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Life of Robert R. McBurney







L I F E  
OF  
ROBERT R. McBURNEY







*John C. Brown*

L I F E

OF

ROBERT R. McBURNEY

BY

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PRESIDENT INTERNATIONAL YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN  
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SPRINGFIELD, MASS.

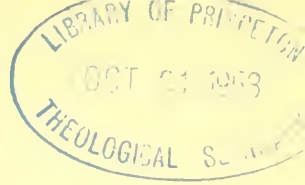


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INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF YOUNG MEN'S  
CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATIONS

TO  
MY HONORED FATHER AND MOTHER  
SIMEON LOCKE DOGGETT AND  
MARY WHITE DOGGETT





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## PREFACE

The American Young Men's Christian Association has completed fifty years of history. The Jubilee Convention at Boston, and the widespread accounts of the association in the public press have given greater prominence than ever to this phase of Christian work. This year celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the association in New York City. It seems opportune, therefore, to present a biography of one who is looked upon by many as the leading factor in developing the Young Men's Christian Associations of America.

It is my hope that this volume will give to believers at large a clearer idea of Robert R. McBurney and the great work of the Young Men's Christian Association. I believe it will also be of much value to the employed officers of the association in setting forth the possibilities of the secretaryship.

I have also had in mind young men who are fitting themselves for this office, and it is my earnest hope that many will be inspired to follow in the footsteps of one who has done so much for his fellowmen.

It has been very difficult in giving an account of the work of one man who has been intimately associated with others, not to seem to overstate his share in the work of which he was only a part. I have not attempted to give a history of the Young Men's Christian Association, but a biography of one of its

## *Preface*

characters. Mr. George A. Warburton, who was for fifteen years associated with McBurney, has kindly contributed a personal sketch for this volume.

I wish to acknowledge obligations to Hon. Cephas Brainerd, Hon. Benjamin F. Manierre, Richard C. Morse, Henry M. Orne, and Dr. M. W. Stryker, for the many courtesies extended to me in the preparation of this volume.

The sources consulted have been the Bowne Historical Library, which contains all the published reports of the Young Men's Christian Associations; "Robert R. McBurney—A Memorial," prepared by Richard C. Morse; McBurney's private letters and papers; and his reminiscences of the early international conventions, written about 1885. Mr. Russell Thompson rendered assistance in gathering material.

It is my hope that the biography of this noble life may prove an inspiration to others to associate their lives in the extension of Christ's Kingdom among young men.

L. L. DOGGETT,

International Young Men's Christian Association Training School,  
Springfield, Mass., February 15, 1902.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Love as an organizing force seems to be the great truth which the life of Robert R. McBurney presents. He was the leading general secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association. His personality expressed itself through the association, and through it he has left his most precious legacy to men. To him more than to any other the association owes its present development and individuality. He dominated. His influence displayed itself not only in his own field of New York City, but in the American and European associations, and even reached young men in unevangelized lands. But pre-eminence in his case was something greater than an insistent will: by loving men he made them love him and serve with energy the cause to which he had given his life. He loved men because he loved his Leader.

Another thing as pre-eminent in this man's life as his dominating love was the ever-present, ever-ready, concern he had for men's salvation. It was hardly possible to come into personal contact with McBurney without feeling his interest in one's eternal welfare. On every hand he made it his business in an engaging and tactful way to establish such relationships as would impress men with this interest. He took advantage of every slight occasion to this end, and in a di-

rect and really loving way he made a personal impress upon thousands of young men. His cordial, earnest greeting, his hand, his look, the few words he spoke, however brief or inconsequential otherwise the interview, lifted the life he touched. Multitudes of young men owe to his efforts their personal salvation, and hundreds of others have been led by him to devote themselves to the ministry or the secretaryship of the Young Men's Christian Association. His chief failing, an occasional brusque, overdominant way, native to his Scotch-Irish character, was often turned to account for the deepening of attachments between himself and his friends, for even out of brief misunderstandings grew reconciliations which more clearly showed the fervor of his love, and which more strongly welded others to himself.

He was a strong, vigorous, creative figure. He found the Young Men's Christian Association plastic and unformed. He gave to it direction and virility. For thirty-six years he lived into it his own rugged and masterful personality, and made it a dominant social and religious force among young men. Without wife or child, the association became love and family to him, and there is nothing distinctive to his life which is not association history. He created the general secretaryship, and thus constituted a new office in the modern church. He discovered the power of Christian young manhood, and trained and organized it for service. He wrought out a fourfold ministration to young men for the development of the physical, intellectual, social, and religious life, and so became one of the pio-



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neers of modern applied Christianity. He was one of a group of association leaders who inaugurated the building movement among the American associations. He was influential in placing the American movement upon an evangelical basis, thus identifying it with the evangelical church. He had a prominent part in shaping the history of the American International Committee, and was a leader in the world's conventions of the Young Men's Christian Association. At a time when industrial changes were making the city the controlling factor in modern life, and when young men were becoming the chief element in the city's population, McBurney was placed in the strategic position of leadership. He became secretary of the chief religious agency among young men in the largest city of the New World.

Of a retiring but positive disposition, he brought to the task before him the qualities of a great executive. Other departments of Christian effort have produced great orators or great writers: the qualities of the leading figure in the Young Men's Christian Association are those of a great executive and administrator.

The ambition of this volume is to make McBurney a living man, a familiar friend, and an inspiration to nobler service, even to those who otherwise have not known of him.

He will be presented, first, in his relation to the New York City Association as its general secretary. To understand his life and its contribution to modern social and religious development, it is necessary to make a careful study of the association of New York City, both in the

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ten years before McBurney took charge of it and in its later development when it became the expression of his ideals.

He will next be presented in his broader service to the associations at large—in relation to the state, international, and world work. The ideals which he wrought into a working force in New York City, McBurney impressed upon the whole association movement. His statesmanlike qualities of comprehensiveness and practicality here shine unrivaled. Even his close friends are hardly aware of how vitally and how widely he touched the association at large.

Lastly, McBurney will be presented in his personal relations to men.

He was a delightful companion and friend, as will be seen from the testimonials of a group of his friends upon the secretarial force, who gathered, after everything public had been said, quietly to recount his influences upon their own individual lives. The following personal sketch, prepared by George A. Warburton, presents to us McBurney as he appeared to one of his friends.

### PEN-PICTURE OF ROBERT R. MCBURNEY

BY GEORGE A. WARBURTON

“The world will be beggared, indeed, when it has lost all sense of hero-worship. The poets will sing no more, and art, in all its many forms, wanting ideals, will die, killed by a prosaic age. For one, I deem not the ancient dead to have been more truly saintly than the most modern, over whose graves the grass has hardly had

time to root. More men walk with Christ now in New York than did in Jerusalem in the days of His flesh. Yet it is easier to see the halo around the head of Peter, through the shadows of centuries by which he is separated from us, than to recognize the right of any man to wear it whose eye looked into ours but a day or two ago.

“McBurney was a saint; not a weak and passive one, but cast in a big mold, and of the finest and best metal; he won his eminence by holy deeds. To know the secrets of any man’s success in the accomplishment of his life work, we must dig down beneath the surface. The things he does, the work he performs, the words he speaks, the sum of his social, religious, physical, and intellectual activities, are but the outflow of the man himself. We may see and measure all these, and yet we may not know the man.

“McBurney was a man of distinguished appearance. He was well built—his body strong and large enough to give good support to his massive head. His pictures show him in his youth with a gentle face and wavy hair; in his manhood, his firm jaw was prominent—not offensively so, but enough to make any man cautious in opposing his will. His eyes were keen, his glance penetrating, his forehead high and intellectual, his features as a whole singularly refined, indicating the sensitiveness which belongs to the poet, and at the same time, showing signs of that virile manliness that constituted one leading element of his strength. Physiognomists say that a prominent nose in a

woman indicates masculinity, and that one delicately chiseled in a man shows the possession of the most attractive and tender qualities of the great feminine nature. McBurney's face told the story of his large sympathy—a sympathy more marked, considering the character of the drains made upon it, and its long continued exercise, than any I have ever known. His voice, too, was an almost perfect instrument for the communication of his affection. There was always harmony between his real feelings and the media of their expression. From a great fountain the manly tear rose spontaneously, the voice grew soft, persuasive, affectionate. The manner and pose all corresponded to the thrill of the soul which had been awakened by the story of some young man's sorrow, temptation, or pain. I remember to have introduced him to a young man, in a perfectly casual fashion. Instantly his gaze was intent, a glow of interest and solicitude came into his face, his manner was that of an affectionate father towards his son. All the yearning desire of his life for the salvation of young men seemed to be focused upon that young stranger. To see him thus was to catch new meaning from the text, 'The love of Christ constraineth me.' It was not merely that he took an interest in the young fellow, but that his body, in every part, told the story of his holy, passionate desire for his salvation.

“The sensitiveness of his spiritual nature was the most marked of all of his many characteristics. His great soul was an instrument answering to the touch of every influence that came

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into contact with it. The fire of his anger was quickly set in a blaze. Wrong roused him as it did few men. Meanness was so foreign to him that its appearance set him burning. It was the penalty which he, in common with all delicately constructed spirits, had to pay for the fineness of his organism. Passion and power live in the same house. It was this fineness of grain, this quality in him, that made him such a lover of the Scriptures. Others may have excelled him in knowledge of the words of the Bible, but he felt and absorbed its vital element. While he mused the fire burned. For this reason his Bible classes were inspirational, and not merely instructive. 'I do not believe in feeding young converts husks,' he cried out in one of our conferences. He never could do that, for the living, germinating truth was always seized by his vital and growing spiritual nature, and what was food to him was eagerly shared with others.

"He loved those hymns best that kept most closely to Scripture, and in which biblical ideas were the most clearly expressed. The dignity of Wesley and Watts answered to his sense of fitness in the poetic treatment of religious truth. He was passionately fond of and was deeply moved by hymns. Looking over the manuscript of a hymn-book in which many of the old standard hymns were used, he was constantly fired by them. He would stand up and read all of the verses of one that particularly struck him. 'Isn't that fine!' he would exclaim, while his whole being seemed under the spell of the beautifully expressed truth.

"His artistic sense was well developed. He

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loved good pictures, and even the decorations of his room bore witness to the possession of the artist soul.

“While his reading was not particularly broad, and he made no attempt to keep pace with the vast output of the modern press, he chose with discrimination those books that he did read. No one ever saw a poor book on his table or in his hand.

“His most constant and successful study was the study of men. He knew men as few men have known them, and it was because of this knowledge that his judgment was so sound and infallible. The conclusions that he reached so quickly as to lead us to say that he possessed intuition, were based upon his knowledge of the motives, moods, and habits of men. His whole life was devoted to the study of human conduct, and he knew by instinct what the result of a certain course of action would be, whether in an individual or in an organization composed of individual units. No man can properly guide his own course or direct the affairs of others who has paid attention to the development of but one side of his nature. He must have had a certain temperamental endowment to begin with—elemental qualities capable of culture and enlargement. McBurney was rich in the possession of his own personality. One could read the history of a good ancestry in him. His features bore witness to it, and all the little spontaneous expressions of language and demeanor confirmed it. Blood and breeding always hang out their signs. Body, mind, and soul were large to begin with. He was not emotional enough to be weak,



McBURNEY AT EIGHTEEN.





## *Introduction*

but had the tenderness of a woman combined with the judgment of a sage. The widest entrance to human hearts is through the gateway of the feelings. He was his own mental master. Years of study and mental discipline had ripened his judgment and made it very discriminating. No man can be a great leader who does not have both heart and head developed. Feeling and judgment must be kept in just proportion and balance. The same qualities that McBurney had would have made him conspicuous anywhere. A bank president once said to me, 'If he had entered business life he would have been a rich man. In my business he would have risen to the top. Such men as he are presidents of railways, or at the head of their professions.'

"He was a great man. He carved his own way to his place of influence. You might put such a man anywhere, and his natural qualities would assert themselves. Patiently, industriously, lovingly, he toiled for others. With splendid self-forgetfulness, and with passionate devotion to his risen Lord, he wrought and gave his life. His place in our affections is secure, and men will continue to honor his memory. 'He that loseth his own life shall find it unto life eternal.'"

*G. A. Wainwright*

## CHAPTER II

### McBURNEY'S EARLY YEARS

THE MCBURNEY FAMILY—CASTLE-BLAYNEY—EARLY RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES AND EDUCATION—ARRIVAL IN AMERICA

Robert Ross McBurney was born March thirty-first, 1837, at Castle-Blayney, a market-place in County Monaghan, in the Protestant province of Ulster, in northern Ireland. He sprang from the sturdy Scotch-Irish stock which has contributed so largely to the commercial prosperity, the moral fiber, and the hardy independence of the American people. He had the religious depth of feeling and the capacity for loyal devotion, and in later life the touch of literary refinement, which belongs to the Celtic race. He had an Irish warmth of heart combined with a Scottish reserve of manner. He had Irish good nature and Scotch pertinacity and determination.

McBurney's father was a prominent physician and surgeon with a large practice in Castle-Blayney and the surrounding country, and was held in high esteem by men of every class. He maintained a dispensary to which the people of the neighborhood were accustomed to go for medicines. Dr. McBurney was an active member and officer in the larger of the two Presbyterian churches of the locality, and was a prominent figure in the open-air reli-

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gious meetings then prevalent. He was zealous in the distribution of religious tracts, was well known for his extreme hostility to Romanism, and was active in the dissemination of anti-papal literature. He used to sit on the porch in front of his house as the Romanist communicants passed on their way to Sunday services and call out, "No popery! No popery!" and from this received the by-name of "No-Pope McBurney" from some of his fellow-townsmen. It is related that his son Robert in his boyhood shared his father's spirit in this respect, and that on one occasion when a young Catholic was being considered for admission to a literary society with which Robert was connected, he so signified his hostility to the proceedings by keeping up the cry of "No pope! No pope!" that he was successful in preventing his admission. But however partisan Robert McBurney may have been in his early youth, there is abundant evidence in later life to show that in the maturity of his view he was a man of liberal toleration, and was particularly sympathetic toward Catholic young men.

He clearly distinguished between the views of different religious bodies, and recognized the difficulties men have with regard to matters of belief. In 1895, in writing to a friend who had asked him as to the wisdom of inviting a Catholic bishop to address a men's gospel meeting, McBurney said: "The general belief of Protestants is that the Roman Catholic Church is in very grave error, and that the influence exerted by that church upon her

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constituents is not as beneficial as the influence exerted by the Protestant Church. From an association standpoint, I doubt the wisdom of inviting the bishop, but from my own individual standpoint, I would not hesitate an instant to invite him, because I believe the Roman Catholic Church to be sound on the deity of our Lord and His atonement—two of the most important points of Christian faith. Personally, I welcome good wherever I find it, and give thanks to God for it.”

McBurney's maternal grandfather was Robert Ross. Mr. Ross was a man highly respected in his section of northern Ireland. Both he and Mrs. Ross were converted and became Wesleyan Methodists at the great religious meetings conducted by John Wesley at the town of Clones, County Monaghan, in the year 1787. Their daughter, Miss Ross, was the first of Dr. McBurney's three wives. She died when Robert, the eldest of her children, was between six and seven years old. She was a friend of Lady Blayney, and a woman highly respected in the community. She was an ardent Methodist, and a member of the little Wesleyan Chapel in Castle-Blayney. It was largely from her that McBurney received the impetus for Bible study which was a conspicuous feature of his later life. His mother, although a loyal Methodist, on Sunday morning attended the First Presbyterian Church with her husband, and Robert was a member of the Bible class in the Sunday school connected with that church. Mrs. McBurney also gave a portion of her time to her own church, and her son used to accom-

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pany her to both the Wesleyan Chapel and Sunday school.

Two years after the death of his first wife, Dr. McBurney married Miss Greer. She was also a Methodist and the daughter of a class-leader in the Wesleyan Chapel. She died shortly after Robert came to America. "He was thus," comments one who knew the family, "under the pious influence of a second Methodist mother," which, no doubt, helped to mold his character and to develop his Methodist preferences. The same friend said, on another occasion, of Robert, that he was not in the fullest sympathy with old-fashioned Presbyterianism.

It will thus be seen that the religious influences which molded the great secretary's early career descended from the two movements which have dominated American Christianity—the Puritan and Wesleyan revivals. Both of these were represented in the church life at Castle-Blayne, in the Presbyterian and Methodist Chapels, and in Robert McBurney's own home in the persons of his father and his mother. This early training laid deep foundations for an interdenominational catholicity of spirit on the one hand, and strong religious convictions on the other, which were of great import for the work in which his life was to be spent.

One characteristic was his decided fondness for church singing and for good hymns, as marked in advanced life as in boyhood. Of hymnody he was always an interested student and an enthusiastic critic.

In an interpretation of his life, it is important

## *Life of Robert R. McBurney*

that emphasis be put upon the strength of his convictions, the determinative influence of considerations of duty, and the dominating power of his strong religious motives. This will explain much in his career that only those of like nature can fully understand. From his boyhood he was ruled by a sensitive and sensible conscience. It is related of him that when a mere lad his only sister requested his escort to a ball given in the vicinity. His remonstrance against what he regarded as the inconsistency of her course being ineffectual, he accompanied her to the door, but refused himself to enter.

In this connection a letter written in 1895 on the subject of dancing is interesting. McBurney said: "I do not think I would want to pass judgment upon an assistant secretary or physical director who dances, without knowing more of the particulars. I certainly do not think it is a sin to dance. It may be judicious on the part of the assistant secretary or physical director, in deference to the opinions of others, to deny himself that pleasure, and indeed, it may be his imperative duty so to deny himself." Evidently McBurney's views in later life had changed considerably.

He confessed conversion when twelve years of age, and throughout his life he placed primary importance upon the doctrine of the new birth.

Dr. McBurney desired his son to follow him in his medical practice, and the boy, even in his younger years at home, became familiar with the various drugs, supplied the simple medical wants of the people who came to the house in his father's absence, and was trusted by them.

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Other than this he engaged in no employment outside of school while in Ireland. He first attended a select school for children taught by a Miss Lee. While a boy of kindly and affectionate disposition, and of behavior quiet and tractable enough, he was not a bright student. He did not possess that love for his lessons which might have led him to shine as a scholar. On at least one occasion he was sent home from Miss Lee's school after wearing the dunce's cap, a special mark of degradation, exposing him to the taunts of his companions. In after life he was always sympathetic with boys, and especially with those who were inclined to mischief. In writing to one of the branch secretaries in New York in 1891, concerning a case of discipline in the boys' department, he said: "I do not know how it is, but I have always had a peculiar affection for unruly young fellows, and have always had ten times more sympathy for them than I have for fellows who are very correct in their deportment. We have a saying that a fellow-feeling makes the world akin; I expect, in my case, it should be said that a fellow-failing gives me a kind of kinship with boisterous boys. They make the best kind of men in the end." When older he attended the national school of Castle-Blayney, and subsequently went to a classical school taught by Rev. Dr. Coulter, who was pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church of the village. Dr. Coulter's school prepared for college, boys of fifteen years of age and upward. McBurney's father gave him this preparation for a university course which he offered to his son in pursuance of his plan to



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direct him toward a professional life, but the young man's inclinations led him in other directions. It was not till later years that his aspirations for general culture gave him habits of reading, and awakened him to acquire a valuable library. The degree of Master of Arts, conferred upon him by Hamilton College in 1869, was a recognition of his mental merit as well as of his influence in affairs.

Monaghan County, in which Castle-Blayney lies, was one of the densely populated agricultural districts of northern Ireland. The town is about eighteen miles from the coast line of the Irish Sea, and midway between Belfast and Dublin, being some fifty miles from each. Like all Ulster towns, Castle-Blayney was a stronghold of Presbyterianism. There were two Presbyterian churches, one in the village and one a short distance away. There were also Episcopal, Baptist, Methodist, and Roman Catholic churches. A brook flowed not far in the rear of Dr. McBurney's house, on whose banks were spent many of the hours of Robert's childhood. The picturesque always appealed strongly to him.

Thus, in the quiet and wholesome surroundings of a country village the early life of the future secretary was passed. His love of truth, his self-reliance, and his fondness for nature were here developed.

During McBurney's youth, Ireland passed through the grievous years of the "potato famine," which brought such desolation and poverty to her peasants. This inaugurated the great Irish immigration to America, which by



## *McBurney's Early Years*

the time McBurney was seventeen years of age, had grown to several hundred thousand persons annually. America was held before the young manhood of Ireland as the promised land of opportunity, and it is not surprising that even the attractions of the comfortable and honorable career of a village physician were insufficient to satisfy the eager and restless spirit of a young man like McBurney.

In leaving Ireland, Robert did not have the sympathy or approval of his father or step-mother, although they put no obstacle in the way of his departure. He always retained the deepest respect and love for his father and an affectionate memory of his mother. One of the striking features of his bachelor apartments in later life was a large portrait of his father which McBurney had had painted. It showed him to be a dignified, sturdy, and rather severe gentleman of the old school.

Robert left the home of his childhood in his eighteenth year, and found himself on board an ocean packet bound for the New World. New to him it was in more than one way. Instead of the quiet village, the turmoil of the great metropolis; instead of the sheltering home, the temptations and fascinations of a great city; instead of the opportunities of taking up his father's practice, there was the necessity of earning a livelihood in a strange land. Landing in New York in the summer of 1854, his whole worldly substance was a few personal effects and a small amount of money. But he was not entirely without friends. He was met by a former tutor, and it is interesting to note that he was

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taken on the day of his arrival to the rooms of the Young Men's Christian Association of New York City, then located in Stuyvesant Institute, 659 Broadway. The association was then but two years old. There is no evidence that this first introduction to the association led to any immediate enlistment in its activities, but it must have made a lasting impression upon his receptive mind.

He had been preceded to America some years earlier by Mr. Henry Harrison, a gentleman who knew Dr. McBurney, and who came from the Church Hill district in the vicinity of Castle-Blayney. He owned a hat establishment at 349 Eighth Avenue, and it was here that McBurney secured a position as clerk at a small salary, remaining in this employ a number of years.

The contrast between his humble clerical work in New York and the position open to him at home was not looked upon favorably by an old friend of the McBurney family, Rev. John Kirkpatrick of New York City, who comments thus: "Many young men and young women of strict respectability are filling here what at home would be considered for them very menial and low positions. Nearly all the servant girls in my church are respectable farmers' daughters, some of them with good education, and highly respectable men's sons are glad to be car-conductors and street-sweepers in New York, all for a decent living. McBurney, I suppose, having but a sovereign when he landed, was glad to drop into anything to make an honest penny."

In accordance with an old-country custom

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Robert lived in the family of his employer. Mr. Harrison was the wealthiest member of the Seventh Avenue United Presbyterian Church, and one of its ruling elders. He was a man of pronounced religious ideas, and the discussions between him and the young Methodist concerning "hymns," "open communion," and the "use of instrumental music in the worship of God," picture McBurney, in his young manhood, as the more liberal of the two. Harrison had no toleration for hymns, organs, and "like trumpery." His views on many such questions were quite repugnant to McBurney. In after years when Rev. Mr. Kirkpatrick, who was acquainted with Mr. Harrison, met McBurney, the latter, he says, "never failed to ask after Mr. Harrison. He had a lively remembrance of him, but no sympathy with his notions."

McBurney remained as an employee in this hat store until failure put an end to the business at the opening of the Civil War. The impress of his business connection remained upon him throughout life. In purchasing a hat he would spend a long time in its selection, visiting a number of stores to find what suited his taste. Further, he was noticeably observant of what young men wore; and if he thought a friend, or office associate, not appropriately or neatly attired, he was apt to make known with Scottish frankness his own impression, coupled often with direct suggestion of improvement.

In August, after his arrival, McBurney connected himself with the Mulberry Street Methodist Episcopal Church. He remained with this church, which later was called St. Paul's, until

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his death. It was in the membership of this church that he became acquainted with Hon. Benjamin F. Manierre, through whom he was later introduced into his life work.

During the years following his arrival in New York, McBurney, while not given much to speaking in public, was very zealous in Christian work. He said later: "As a young man I was very active, often on Sunday attending a class meeting and preaching service in the morning, a mission Sunday school and meeting of the Young Men's Christian Association in the afternoon, and then after a hurried tea going out to church service or some missionary meeting in the evening." While a member of the Methodist Church, at times he attended others, one of his favorites being the Market Street Reformed Dutch Church, of which Rev. Theodore L. Cuyler, D.D. was the pastor. In after years, he told Dr. Cuyler that his preaching had strongly influenced him, quoted some of his texts, and called himself "one of his boys."

In writing to McBurney during his last illness, Mr. Dickson, secretary of the Twenty-third Street Branch, said: "Dr. Cuyler came in this morning to inquire about you. He said a number of times over, 'Be sure to give my love to Robert.' He wanted me to tell you that yesterday he went down to 'Old Market Street,' and that everything about the church was just as it was 'when Robert and McAlpin used to sit in the gallery.'"

St. Paul's Church established a mission school in the neighborhood of Elizabeth Street, and about 1856 McBurney went to Mr. Manierre

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with an invitation to become its superintendent. This Mr. Manierre consented to do, and McBurney worked with him in this Sunday school as a teacher, and rendered what other service he could. Mr. Manierre remembers him in this connection as most diligent, as one of the strongest of the young men who shared in the work, and as displaying a matured Christian character. Mr. Manierre continued as the superintendent, and McBurney as a teacher and general assistant of this Sunday school for some years. He speaks of McBurney as his right-hand man, and remembers that he led in prayer acceptably, and while little speaking was done from the platform he was never impressed with anything like diffidence. He says: "McBurney never failed in being on hand, and his chief if not his only activity outside of business was religious work."

He was one of the young men active in carrying on the association noon prayer-meetings in the North Dutch Church on Fulton Street, in 1856, the year before the general revival. He was a member of the association committee which had charge of these meetings, and aided in the distribution of cards among business houses.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, McBurney was a capable young man, active in Christian work, but with no other thought than devoting himself to a business career.

It will be seen that he had gone through a similar experience to that of thousands of young men who leave the village or the farm to make their home and career in the modern city. He

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was fitted by experience, by religious conviction, by temperament, and by personal characteristics to be helpful in a tender and sympathetic, yet strong and manly, way to young men who were surrounded by the conditions of modern city life. He was providentially prepared for the work he was about to be called to undertake. He knew young men—their temptations, their struggles, their needs, their possibilities, their peril. He had been alone in a great city, he had been without money, and almost without friends. He knew what it was to need work, he knew what it was to overcome temptation, and above all he knew what it was to lead a life of trust and loving devotion to Jesus Christ.

## CHAPTER III

### THE YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION IN NEW YORK CITY, FROM 1852 TO 1862

#### THE CITY MOVEMENT—NEW YORK CITY IN 1850—THE FOUNDING OF THE NEW YORK CITY ASSOCIATION

We turn now to consider the field of work which was providentially prepared for the coming leader. It is necessary, in order to understand the life of McBurney, to study the development of the organization of which he was to become the employed officer. During the eight years that, as a clerk in a hat store, and as a teacher in a mission Sunday school, McBurney was learning the needs of young men, the New York Young Men's Christian Association was laying the foundations upon which a great work for young men was to be established.

The most striking sociological development of the past century has been the industrial revolution, which has transferred the larger share of the wealth and a large proportion of the population from the country to the town. In England, this movement began with the invention of the steam engine; in America, with the application of steam to transportation by the invention of the locomotive. Almost equally important was the discovery of the



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Bessemer process for the manufacture of steel. The years from 1830 to 1840 mark the beginning of this transition in America. The urban movement has in England already housed two-thirds of its population in towns. In America, in spite of its enormous agricultural resources, the city has already become dominant. In 1898, the exportation of manufactured products exceeded in value the exportation of products from the farms. Nearly 40 per cent of Americans are in towns of 8,000 population and upwards. It is significant that the proportion of young men tends to increase with the size of the modern city. Not only are large numbers found in great cities, but the proportion of the population which is young men is invariably greater. The country no longer needs the labor of young men as it did a few generations ago. Through the invention of machinery and other causes, a constantly decreasing portion of the race is able to produce the world's food.

The city holds out the fascinations of a career, and is the goal towards which young men move. While the city is the center of wealth, refinement, and religious power, it is at the same time the headquarters for the forces of evil. The powers of evil are concentrated in the city as in no other place. Young men from the country, or with city homes, under modern urban conditions are exposed to the most seductive temptations. Without restraint, surrounded by the fascinations of pleasure, the temptations of vice, filled with the eager desire to secure wealth, often separated from friends, and indif-



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ferent or hostile to the church, many of them fall into lives of dissipation and ruin.

It was under these conditions, and to meet this need, that the Young Men's Christian Association was founded by George Williams, in London, in June, 1844, and it was due to the rise of the city that the association spread throughout the world.

No modern metropolis so typifies this urban movement as the financial capital of the New World. Political ideals, government necessity, or other causes, created the cities of the Old World. New York rose into dominance on the crest of the industrial movement which produced the modern city. It is pre-eminently a business men's city. Its prosperity dates from the year 1825, when the opening of the Erie Canal made New York the emporium for the commerce of the great lakes and the limitless agricultural products of the growing West. It had then but 160,000 inhabitants, but its increase from that time has been swift and constant. Twenty-seven years later (1852), at the time of the founding of the New York Young Men's Christian Association, the population of the city was 600,000. It had become the recognized metropolis of America, its financial center, and already the chief terminus of its railroad systems. Very soon half the foreign commerce of the nation passed through New York City, and five-sevenths of the immigrants from other shores landed at Castle Garden.

Of the religious forces contributing to the complex life of the developing metropolis, the Dutch, the Presbyterian, and the Episcopal

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churches were particularly strong. These churches gave the impress to the early religious life of the city. They were soon joined by other Protestant bodies, and immigration brought in a large Roman Catholic population. During the early years, religious activity in the city was not remarkable, but the revivals in the middle of the century, and the problems created by the influx of an enormous unevangelized population, roused the church to strenuous endeavor. At the close of the century, it is said that in its Christian activities, its city missions, and its various philanthropies, the churches of New York City were expending more money for the evangelization of its crowded population than all American Christians were contributing for the evangelization of the heathen world.

But New York City was also filled with countless agencies for the wrecking of manhood. No other city in America held out more fascinations to the careless and self-centered. Its theaters, saloons, and vicious resorts allured the young men from the cheerless boarding-houses, and multitudes from the crowded tenement districts. The gates of sin stood wide.

To meet this condition was plainly the mind of those who founded the New York Young Men's Christian Association. Dr. Isaac Ferris, at the first public meeting, said :

“Our city has proved a mōra' maelstrom to many a noble spirit who had none to fulfill the kindly words of the Saviour, ‘I was a stranger and ye took me in.’ Time was when a lad who came to the city to be an apprentice, or clerk, or student, found a home in the circle

of his employer. His house and his place of business were the same. But now it is sadly altered. The lad is left to the wide world. He is surrounded by the mercenary and callous, and happy is he if he escape unhurt."

At the opening of the first rooms of the association, Mr. Daniel Lord said:

"The young men who come to try their fortunes in the great cities are not the ordinary and common youth of the land. Such remain at home contented to till the paternal acres, to pursue the modest and reputable mechanical trade of their native village. Happy the life of such to those who will satisfy themselves with it. But many others there are 'who have heard of battles and long to follow to the field some warlike lord.' Such are they who have left a peaceful village with little experience and no knowledge of how small it is, and who find themselves in the streets of a great city seeking their fortunes. How is the stranger youth armed to meet the attack of worldly excitement and sensual allurements? No one now observes who knows him. If he finds employment, he also soon finds that the business of his employer is too weighty, his time too much absorbed, for him to bestow care or sympathy upon his humble assistant; and although having the deepest pecuniary interests in his principles and mode of life, the employer too often is obliged to trust his assistant's mode of life to the moderation of his wages, and for his principles to the vigor of the police and the fear of criminal justice. The young stranger, as to social intercourse, is no less dangerously and painfully conditioned.

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No solitude is so great nor so sickening to the heart as that which may be felt amid the multitudes of a great city. Every one is absorbed in his own interests and cares not for you."

The founder of the New York Young Men's Christian Association was Mr. George H. Petrie. In 1851 the London Young Men's Christian Association was seven years old, and was firmly established with comfortable headquarters at Gresham Street. There were already seven branches in the metropolis beside the parent association, and sixteen provincial branches in different parts of England, with a total enrollment of two thousand seven hundred young men. These twenty-three branches were all under the supervision of the parent association.

The aim of this organization was to win young men to Jesus Christ by any means in accordance with the Scriptures. The parent society possessed a reading-room, library, lunch-room, social parlors, and rooms for educational and Bible classes and prayer meetings. It was in charge of a secretary who gave his whole time to its interests. It was during a visit to the Crystal Palace Exposition that Mr. George H. Petrie of New York became acquainted with the London Society and its work. He says: "During a residence of some twelve months in London, in the years 1850 and 1851, I was brought into contact with a number of leading Christian brethren who were heartily engaged in the work of the Young Men's Christian Association in that city, and through the secretary, Mr. T. H. Tarleton, I was afforded the opportunity of learning all the main features

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relating to the aim and working of the association."

Quite independent of Mr. Petrie, efforts were already under way to establish associations on the London model at both Montreal and Boston. These attempts were successful, and in December, 1851, in each of these cities an association was established.

Among Mr. McBurney's papers is a letter from Mr. Petrie, in which he says:

"Impressed with the thought that New York City greatly needed such an organization, on my return from London in the autumn of 1851, I at once deliberated as to the best course to pursue in order to attain this object, and to establish an association on a solid and permanent basis. I well remember the first evening's consultation with Messrs. H. K. Bull, Milton St. John, and Oliver P. Woodford, before whom the whole subject was plainly stated. [This was in November, 1851.] Although these gentlemen's Christian love and impulses were strongly favorable to the movement, I confess a feeling of disappointment came over me that they did not so enthusiastically enter into the idea of our city's need for a Young Men's Christian Association.

"This feeling, however, soon passed away, as the subsequent action of these gentlemen proved them to be considerate and hearty espousers of the object."

Several meetings were held at the houses of one or the other, each time a larger number coming together. It was now decided by the young men to visit the pastors of the city and

learn their views. As the project was new, there was hesitation on the part of some who feared that the movement was not suited to New York, or that it would be injurious to the churches as an outside attraction, and that its meetings might draw young men away from church gatherings and church work. But Rev. Drs. James W. Alexander and Isaac Ferris were strongly impressed with the new project, and the need of some such ministry to the young men of New York City.

An important meeting was held at Mr. Petrie's home on April twenty-first, 1852, at which a preliminary organization was formed, of which he was made secretary. Minutes have been kept of this and subsequent gatherings. At this meeting the following resolution was adopted:

"Resolved, that . . . . the young men now assembled deem it desirable that an association be formed, consisting of members of evangelical churches in this city, to be called the New York Young Men's Christian Association, which shall be conducted on a plan resembling that of similar societies in London and other large cities, and that we invite the co-operation of the Christian young men of this city for the accomplishment of this purpose."

A number of meetings of this preliminary organization took place, at which a spirit of enthusiasm for the new movement developed. A committee was appointed, of which Mr. Petrie was one, to send out a circular to the young men of New York City. At one of the meetings, Mr. Woodford spoke "of the necessity

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of more intimacy among the members of the church of Christ, in order that Christian influences might be felt, not only in this city, but throughout the Union." Copies of the constitutions of both the London and Boston Young Men's Christian Associations were in the hands of these young men, and letters were interchanged with the secretary of the Boston society. At one meeting it was voted to secure sufficient copies of the Boston constitution to place one in the hands of each clergyman in the city, and if this could not be done, to reprint the last report of the London Association. A considerable number of the Boston constitutions were procured.

Finally, it was arranged to call a general public meeting, to be held at the Mercer Street Presbyterian Church, on May twenty-eighth, 1852.

During the months from January to May, 1852, the Boston Young Men's Christian Association had grown rapidly. It had opened rooms on the corner of Washington and Summer Streets. The opening address had been given by Dr. Lyman Beecher, before 600 young men, who said: "I always felt sure the millenium would come, but never so sure of it before as now. I breathe a longer, deeper breath than I ever breathed before." The Boston membership had already reached 1,200, and 10,000 copies of their constitution had been printed and distributed widely over the country. Associations had been formed at Worcester, Springfield, and Buffalo.

The meeting at the Mercer Street Presbyterian Church was attended by 300 young men.



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Rev. George T. Bedell, rector of the Ascension Church, presided, and a stirring address was delivered by Chancellor Isaac Ferris. At this meeting 173 young men signified their desire to become members, and a temporary organization was effected, of which Mr. J. W. Benedict was made chairman.

Finally, a meeting for permanent organization, at which a constitution was adopted and officers elected, was held at the Mercer Street Presbyterian Church on June thirtieth, 1852, and the New York City Young Men's Christian Association was definitely started upon its career of usefulness.

NOTE.—The first list of officers contained a number of men who became prominent in the organization, among them: Oliver P. Woodford, who was the first president; Rev. Howard Crosby, who was its second president, and who largely dominated its policy during its early years; Benjamin F. Manierre, who several times led in delivering the association from debt, and as we shall learn, rendered it one of its greatest services; George H. Petrie, who founded the association; and Mr. Samuel W. Stebbins, who served as president a number of times, and helped to revive the association during the war. The constitution was as follows:

### PREAMBLE

We, the subscribers, actuated by a desire to promote evangelical religion among the young men of this city and its vicinity, and impressed with the importance of concentrated effort to aid in accomplishing that object, and desirous of forming an association in which we may together labor for the great end proposed, hereby agree to adopt for our united government the following



# The Young Men's Christian Association

## CONSTITUTION

### ARTICLE I

SEC. 1. The name of this society shall be "The New York Young Men's Christian Association," and it shall be located in the city of New York.

SEC. 2. The object of this association shall be the improvement of the spiritual, mental, and social condition of young men, by the ways and means to be hereinafter designated.

### ARTICLE II

#### Members

SEC. 2. Any man under forty years of age, who is a member, in good standing, of an evangelical church, may become an active member by payment in advance of one dollar annually. *Active members only* shall have the right to vote, and be eligible to office; and it shall be their particular duty to carry out the objects of this association.

SEC. 3. Any man of good moral character may become an associate member, by the payment in advance of one dollar annually, and shall be entitled to all the privileges of the association, except that of voting and being eligible to office.

### ARTICLE III

SEC. 1. The members of the association shall seek out young men taking up their residence in New York and its vicinity, and endeavor to bring them under moral and religious influences, by aiding them in the selection of suitable boarding-places and employment, by introducing them to the members and privileges of this association, securing their attendance at some place of worship on the Sabbath, and by every means in their power surrounding them with Christian associates.

SEC. 2. The members of the association shall exert themselves to interest the churches to which they respectively belong in the object and welfare of the associa-

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tion. They shall labor to induce all suitable young men of their acquaintance to connect themselves with the association, and use all practical means for increasing its membership, activity, and usefulness.

### ARTICLE IV

SEC. 1. The officers of this association shall consist of a president, one vice-president from each denomination represented in the association, selected severally by their respective denominations, a recording secretary, a corresponding secretary, a treasurer, and a librarian; also a board of managers consisting of twenty members, of which each denomination shall be entitled to a number proportioned to its representation in the association, of which the officers elect shall be ex-officio members.

SEC. 2. All of the above-named officers shall be elected by ballot, on the last Monday evening in May, and shall enter upon office, and hold the same for one year from the first day of June following said election.

Article V was devoted to the duties of officers. Section 5 is interesting as showing the duty of the only employed officer of the organization.

SEC. 5. It shall be the duty of the librarian to take charge and keep in order all books, documents, and other movable property of the association, keep a correct catalogue and account of the same, and also a record of all books delivered to the members of the association.

A comparison of the constitution with the Boston and London documents shows that it chiefly followed the former. The most striking feature was the division of the membership into active and associate members. The aim of this division was to place the control of the association completely in the hands of evangelical Christians, and at the same time bring under its influence young men who were not professed Christians.

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The object of the society was the same as that of the London association—the intellectual and spiritual welfare of young men. Rooms were secured in Stuyvesant Institute, No. 659 Broadway, opposite Bond Street. It was to these rooms two years later that Robert McBurney came on his arrival in America. The rooms were formally opened on September twentieth, 1852, and an address was delivered by Daniel Lord. In the course of this address Mr. Lord outlined the conception of association work of that day: to aid the stranger in finding proper abode; to help him in securing employment; to furnish him a place of relaxation under good influences; to provide a well-equipped reading-room; to supply some entertainment in the form of an appropriate lecture course; to care for him in sickness; to give him introduction into city homes; and to lead him into a Christian life.

The association was to pass through the vicissitudes of ten years of history before it came under the leadership of McBurney. These were years of uncertainty and experiment. The movement was without resources, without experience, and without trained leaders, and yet in at least two respects these were years of greatness. During this period, except perhaps at the Troy convention, the New York association refused to take the leadership in the national movement, which it afterwards acquired; it was disturbed by discussions over slavery, and on two occasions was burdened with debt. But it was during these very years that the association promoted the great revival of 1857 and 1858,

and the United States Christian Commission which preached the gospel to the soldiers during the war.

The international organization of the association of the United States and Canada was known during the first few years under the name of the Confederation.

This was established chiefly through the efforts of Mr. (afterward Rev. Dr.) William Chauncy Langdon of Washington, who succeeded in calling the first international convention at Buffalo in 1854. Mr. Langdon wished the New York association to take the initiative in calling this convention, and also to co-operate in the publication of a national journal.

The man who particularly opposed Mr. Langdon was Dr. Howard Crosby, who became the second president of the New York association, and continued in this relation for three years. He was a scholarly man, of mental force and strong personality, which was distinctly impressed upon the New York association in its early development. He was its dominating spirit. Mr. Langdon, in his early story of the Confederation, says:

“In fact, without being as yet fully conscious of it, perhaps on either side, the associations of Washington and New York were representative types of two distinct principles. In the New York society, its work and purpose were all at hand. All its efforts, attention, and interest were concentrated upon the home work, save only as occasion might from time to time involve correspondence with some other body. The Washington association, on the contrary, whose

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membership was gathered from every portion of the Union, with thoughts and prayers divided between scenes and friends at home and those abroad, became even more naturally the exponent of very different interests. Professor Crosby had clearly and strongly emphasized views of what the New York association might and should be to the young men of that city, and standing thus for intensive duty, he wished that body to turn its attention from that work neither to the right nor to the left. Professor Crosby and I regarded our aims and plans for the association as practically antagonistic."

Two conspicuous considerations influenced the New York association in taking an adverse attitude toward a general organization. One was desire for an avoidance of political discussion, which the slavery issue in those days made very imminent; and the other was fear of central control over local organizations.

The New York association studiously sought to keep the slavery question out of its affairs, and had its own bitter experience in regard to this matter. In 1853 an attempt was made to exclude from the library the great anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and this proposal aroused a warm discussion in the board of management which led to a careful definition of the powers of the library committee. Professor Crosby thoroughly believed that should associations of all parts of the country be brought together into a national organization a rupture upon this question would ensue.

The large associations of Boston, New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, which contained

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half of the association membership in the country, agreed with President Crosby in declining to aid the establishment of any national organization.

In spite of opposition, however, Mr. Langdon persevered; and finally a convention was called at Buffalo in June, 1854, which was attended by thirty-seven delegates from nineteen different societies. The New York association was not represented. This convention voted to establish a confederation when twenty-two associations should give in their allegiance to the movement. When ten had been secured, it was evident that nothing further could be accomplished without some change in the situation. Toronto demanded an expression on the slavery question. This brought a crisis. To decide either way would shut out some important associations on one side or the other.

In October, 1854, Mr. McCarty, corresponding secretary of the New York association, wrote to Mr. Langdon that a judicious, friendly course on the part of the committee, seconding the efforts of those in New York who favored the confederation, "might disarm those who seem overprudent in the matter." Mr. McCarty was asked for suggestions, and a circular was drawn up in accordance with these, pointing out that the central committee of the confederation "was not a governing function authorized to assume any control, but rather a creature of the confederated associations for certain definite and limited purposes." It assumed that the committee had no right to make any expression at all on a political question.

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Two days after the issuance of this circular, November twentieth, 1854, the New York association held a meeting, in which it was voted to approve the proceedings of the Buffalo Convention, and to give in a limited adhesion to the central committee as a committee of correspondence. "This circular and the subsequent action of the New York association had an early and farspreading influence," said Mr. Langdon, and by January, 1855, 20 of the necessary 22 ratifications had been received.

The chief friend of the confederation cause in the New York association was Mr. Richard C. McCormick, who contributed greatly to stimulating an interest in association work at large by making a tour not only of the associations in America but in England and on the Continent of Europe.

In deference to the New York association, it was proposed that the second convention should be held there, and the central committee located in that city. But Dr. Crosby replied to a letter seeking to learn if such a step would be acceptable in New York, that the New York association had "unanimously decided in full meeting that we deem any convention inexpedient, and decline any connection with such. We gave our adhesion to the central committee merely as to a committee of correspondence to cement the associations by that proper means." The reasons for his position were stated: "1. We believe conventions draw off attention from local work, and our institution is essentially local; 2. We believe they foster a centralizing spirit at war with independent action; 3. We



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believe they will tend to produce unpleasant scenes and ruptures on such subjects as slavery; 4. We believe the expense unauthorized by our main object; 5. We believe fraternal feelings between the associations may be better cultivated by correspondence and chance visits."

It was not until after the war that the New York association, under the leadership of Cephas Brainerd, McBurney, and others, took its natural place of leadership in the general work.

With what reason the New York association feared the disrupting influence of the slavery issue may be judged from the disturbance caused by that issue in the New York organization itself. This disturbance was sufficiently violent to cause a rent in the membership, and threatened the complete downfall of the society. A number of the association members were active in the Frémont campaign of 1856, and figured in a procession given that summer. This procession was savagely caricatured by the *New York Express*, a rather violent political organ. The chairman of the library committee excluded the *Express* from the rooms of the association in August, 1856. This was done simply by stopping the subscription which caused no trouble; but the ground of the action became noised about, and the *Express* began an attack on the association as a political organization. Some members of the association on their individual responsibility unwisely replied to the *Express* through the columns of the *Post*, and during December and January of 1856 and 1857 a heated newspaper conflict was waged. Unfortunately, an effort was made to expel some



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members of the library committee, and to return the Express to the association files. The papers of New York took up the issue as a political fight, and the association suffered in the estimation of a large element in the community.

The organization drew into itself a considerable anti-slavery element, which undertook to pass a set of resolutions denouncing slavery. There were some warm discussions, but a majority prevented the adoption of any expression on the issue as out of place in an organization of the nature of the Young Men's Christian Association. This displeased the Abolitionist element, who succeeded in ordering a full investigation of the Express incident and the action of the board. This investigation caused a number of heated meetings.

While the association never yielded to the attempts on the part of some over-zealous members to commit it to an expression on a political issue, nevertheless these agitations lost to the association the sympathy of a considerable portion of the community. The conservative element, which was made up of many of the leading young men in business circles in the city to the number of 150, decided to withdraw in a body. Their resignations were all signed to one paper. But the other party succeeded on the night when the resignations were offered in presenting the names of a larger number of new members. The continued dissatisfaction of such an influential body of men in its effect on the community's attitude towards the association was one of the important factors which led to its decline in the succeeding five years. In fact,

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there was not a full recovery from this loss until near the close of the war, when a large number of those who had been dissatisfied returned unitedly as they had withdrawn.

At this point in the narrative, interest attaches to the fact that eight years later resolutions were adopted, April seventeenth, 1865, upon the assassination of President Lincoln: "Resolved, that we humble ourselves in contrition for the assent by us given in times past to this system of sin, and definitely promise for the future a more perfect conformity to that freedom wherewith Christ has made us free." The intensifying influences of four years of civil strife altered more than one situation.

Whatever might be the political agitation of the times, the New York association was nevertheless devoting itself assiduously to working out its great mission among the young men of the city. Early in the year 1856, several members, among them Mr. L. L. Deane, became convinced that "some means should be adopted by which to reach the 150,000 young men residing in the heart of the metropolis. This conviction was strengthened by the report of Mr. Richard C. McCormick relating to the operation of kindred associations in Great Britain and other parts of Europe.

In August, after a vain effort to secure the John Street Methodist Church, application was made by Mr. Deane for the use of the consistory of the Dutch Reformed Church on Fulton Street, for the purpose of carrying on union prayer-meetings chiefly for men. The use of the rooms was granted on any evening not re-

quired for meetings of the church, and a weekly meeting was commenced. The first noon prayer-meeting was held in September, 1856. The meeting was held daily for a time, and then three times a week, between 12 and 1 o'clock. This continued until the summer of 1857, when it was deemed best, owing to the absence of many from the city, to suspend it for a time.

These meetings were upon a purely union basis. The invitation was, "Come and go as you like, and stay no longer than suits your convenience." A number of gentlemen from the Young Men's Christian Association cooperated with Mr. Deane, among them Robert R. McBurney and Edward Colgate. This is McBurney's first recorded service in connection with the association.

"In order to gather young men to these meetings, printed cards of invitation were distributed copiously in houses of business. Late in the summer, under the lead of Mr. Colgate, a number of the members of the association were making arrangements for reopening the noon meeting." While the committee was in session in a store in the neighborhood of Fulton Street, Mr. J. C. Lamphier, who, in the mean time, on July first, had been appointed city missionary by the consistory of the Dutch Reformed Church, called and said he had already taken some steps toward reopening the meeting. He urged the young men to leave it in his care, and asked them to take hold with him and help sustain it rather than have two meetings. The young men approved of this proposition, provided the exercises be sustained on a thoroughly

union basis. They went to work with Mr. Lamphier and co-operated heartily.

In the mean time the financial depression which was sweeping over the whole country was approaching a crisis. The most serious financial panic which New York or the country at large has ever experienced came in October, 1857. It was so overwhelming that it prostrated the monetary system of the country. This panic turned the attention of thousands of business men to the consideration of other than worldly matters, and was followed by a marvellous religious awakening which stirred the entire nation. Immediately the prayer-meeting at the Dutch Reformed Church became crowded. Soon three meetings were being held simultaneously in different parts of the Consistory building. Members of the Young Men's Christian Association were active in these meetings. The crowds became so large "it was clearly seen that the association had only just entered upon its work; and in February a committee was appointed to organize and sustain free of expense to the association union prayer-meetings in such sections of the city as the necessities of the case and the signs of the time seemed to demand." Meetings were started by the association in the John Street Methodist Church, in the Ninth Street Dutch Reformed Church, in the Dutch Church at Broome and Green streets, in Burton's old theater, and in the Central Presbyterian Church. "A circular letter was prepared expressly for the clergy, setting forth the object of the association, and giving an account of the union prayer-meetings held in the city." Other agencies beside the

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Young Men's Christian Association rallied to this movement, until in New York City alone one hundred and fifty noon prayer-meetings were being carried on simultaneously. The report sent by the American International Committee to the World's Conference, held at Geneva, July, 1858, says:

“Union prayer-meetings are maintained or have been in all our large places. By the union meetings large churches, or even deserted theaters have been crowded. In them sectarianism is lost. It has been perceived that the principle and practice of cordial union among Christians of different persuasions, not for ecclesiastical purposes, but for the cultivation of personal holiness and the conversion of men, is the primary force which has sustained and advanced this awakening. Where did the principle and practice originate and find embodiment? Was it not in the Young Men's Christian Association? These associations have steadily advanced and increased in numbers. All this had been going on for years, and the great principle of religious activity upon a union basis had become a practical fact. Hence, the agency for the great work was at hand. As the revival proceeded upon a union basis, our associations were ready at the outset without any adjustment of machinery for the work. The union field was emphatically their field. In many places, as in New York, Baltimore, and Louisville, our associations were the first to hold union meetings, the example of which was soon followed by the churches.”

The report of the New York association for

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1862 says: "The noon-day union prayer-meeting in Fulton Street, now in successful operation, will so long as it continues, or the memory of it remains, be a monument and a proof of the good our association has accomplished. The young men composing the committee which planted the seeds and watched the young life of that now renowned and blessed meeting are still numbered among our most earnest members."

The distinguishing characteristic of the revival was prayer. The movement was begun with prayer and carried on by prayer.

The second feature was the place given to laymen. It was distinctly a laymen's revival.

The third was the union basis already referred to.

This revival is recognized as having had a profound and permanent effect upon the general association movement. It gave an evangelistic character to the work, but at the same time led many of the associations away from their proper field of specific work for young men into a great variety of evangelistic undertakings. The New York association never swerved from its original purpose, and it was later, under the leadership of McBurney and others, that the association movement was brought back into its distinctive sphere.

The closing contribution of the New York association during the period before McBurney became its secretary was its share in the founding of the United States Christian Commission for ministering to the spiritual and physical necessities of the soldiers and seamen during

the Civil War. The far-reaching revival of 1858 had raised the spiritual life of the American people, and prepared the church as never before for a missionary endeavor. The United States Christian Commission was the first organized attempt of the Protestant Church on a large scale to carry the gospel to men under arms.

On the fifteenth of April, 1861, President Lincoln issued his first call for volunteers. On April eighteenth, Vincent Colyer, representing the New York Young Men's Christian Association, visited the Sixth Massachusetts Volunteers, then on their way to Washington. The New York association appointed an army committee on May twenty-seventh. Immediately following the battle of Bull Run, on Sunday, July twenty-first, two representatives of the New York association were sent to Washington with supplies. During the summer, "the barracks and encampments within a radius of thirty miles around New York City were visited, and services held with as much regularity as circumstances would allow." Mr. Vincent Colyer was appointed field representative of the New York army committee. The Union army at that time enrolled 250,000 soldiers, chiefly young men. Mr. Colyer wrote, "that the mission which had been undertaken in Christian sympathy as a temporary task would have to be taken up and extended as a permanent duty."

On August twenty-second, 1861, he sent a letter to the New York association, suggesting the calling of a convention of the Young Men's Christian Associations to inaugurate a systematic work



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for the entire army. Steps were taken at once. Correspondence was entered into with various army chaplains. A special committee of the New York society, with Mr. Colyer as chairman, was instructed to push the plan. The international committee, of which Mr. George Stuart was chairman, was at this time located in Philadelphia. On October first, Mr. Colyer wrote to the secretary of this committee the letter which led directly to the founding of the commission. He said:

“Having been occupied for these last ten weeks in the army at Washington as representative of the New York association, the necessity for a more extended organization has so impressed itself upon me that I cannot avoid writing you for aid. I wish to ask the committee, of which you are the honored secretary, to earnestly consider the propriety of calling a general convention at some central place at the earliest practicable day, to consider the spiritual wants of the young men of our army, in order that the same may be provided for by the appointing of a Christian Commission, whose duty it shall be to take charge of this entire work.”

This convention was called to meet at the rooms of the New York Young Men's Christian Association, at the Bible House, on November fourteenth. At this convention the United States Christian Commission, of which Mr. George H. Stuart was made chairman, was created. This commission aimed to preach the gospel to every soldier and marine, to relieve the sick and wounded, and to bring cheer from home in every way possible to the men at the front. In carry-



ing out this mission the commission sent out over 5,000 volunteer delegates, who served an average of twenty-eight days each. The commission raised and expended \$6,290,000 in cash and supplies. The army committee of the New York association was continued, and for most of the time during the war had 150,000 soldiers and sailors under its immediate ministrations in the neighborhood of the metropolis.

The close of the first decade of the history of the New York association found it sadly depleted. The society had never thoroughly recovered from the loss of such a large number of its prominent members during the heated political discussions of 1856. The financial panic in the fall of 1857 was disastrous to the association membership. This was not peculiar to New York, but was seen in the experience of associations elsewhere in the country. The condition was also felt by other voluntary organizations, many library associations formally considering the expediency of disbanding. The association movement experienced a similar depression later, following the financial crises of 1873 and 1893.

Through several years the finances of the New York association were in a wavering state. Once a deficit was wiped out under the leadership of Benjamin F. Manierre, but debt soon again gained mastery, and in 1860 reached the sum of \$1,000. The report for that year discouragingly says: "The association is still alive. We do not intend to rehearse all the difficulties and troubles which have attended its life. Like

many benevolent associations at the present time, we are somewhat in debt, our expenses having considerably exceeded our receipts, and owing to the peculiar state of the times, we have not been able to carry out a plan which we hoped would relieve us from all further anxiety in financial matters."

By the beginning of 1862, the association was, according to the report, burdened "with a debt of nearly \$2,400, which had been incurred by previous boards of direction, and suffered to accumulate until its magnitude had become appalling, and had seriously paralyzed not only all efforts to reduce the liability, but all active interest in the association itself."

As a final stroke of adverse circumstances, came the war. This resulted in the abandonment of nearly all of the Young Men's Christian Associations throughout the country. There were 240 at the beginning of the war, and only sixty at its close. The New York report for 1862 states: "Large numbers of our own young men have left with the fast departing regiments for the place of conflict, and for this as one reason we have not been able to perform the work more immediately contemplated in our constitution. The active men on our committees became the active men in the camp and on the field." It is a tribute to the type of young men who formed the Young Men's Christian Association of the country in 1861, that so many of them from patriotic motives left their homes and occupations at their country's call. The membership had been gradually dwindling. In the early years of the association the enrollment

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was from 1,000 to 1,500 members; by the beginning of 1862 only 151 young men remained. The report for 1862 said: "To many there seemed little hope of relief; indeed, by some of its old friends and founders the question had been seriously considered of liquidating its liabilities and dissolving the organization." Even the clergymen of the city, to a large extent, seemed to have lost active interest in the effort.

The association of New York City had accomplished a great work, but it was in need of a leader with genius and devotion, with an inextinguishable desire of winning young men to Jesus Christ, who could place the organization in a position of power and usefulness. That leader was to be found in Robert R. McBurney. He was about to enter upon a period of direct training for his life of usefulness among young men. He was to learn from the older men with whom he came to associate the art of administration and of leadership.

## CHAPTER IV

### MCBURNEY'S FIRST YEARS AS SECRETARY, 1862-1865

REVIVAL OF THE NEW YORK WORK—MC BURNEY APPOINTED AS SECRETARY—THE ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SIXTH VOLUNTEERS—RETURN OF OLD MEMBERS—OPENING OF NEW ROOMS—RESIGNATION AND RETURN

Events in the New York association were rapidly approaching their worst when the hat establishment in which McBurney was employed failed like many other concerns which gave way under the business conditions attending the beginning of the war. This left McBurney without employment. After a period in which he dropped out of the observation of Mr. Manierre, he appeared at the office of the lawyer and told him that he was not doing well. Mr. Manierre's political activity had sent him to the New York senate, and he set about to use his influence for the young man in his time of need. In response to his efforts he received some assurances that McBurney would be appointed to a position in the Custom House.

While this was pending, the affairs of the association reached a crisis. A clergyman who was one of the organization's most earnest supporters came to Mr. Manierre and told him that the "association was doing nothing, that it had run down, was suffering from a heavy debt, that there was no apparent way out, and that

it seemed time to put up the white flag." He declared, however, that they could not afford to let the association go down. The two together planned a meeting of some of the leaders to see what could be done. This was early in the year 1862. About the same time, Hon. Cephas Brainerd, active in the association through almost its whole history, was invited by one of its officers to take luncheon with him. Here the plan was unfolded to close the association by omitting the annual election, which was then approaching. Mr. Brainerd did not commit himself, but proceeded at once to the rooms of the Importer's and Trader's Insurance Company, of which Mr. Manierre was president and Mr. Frank W. Ballard secretary. After a conference, these gentlemen decided to put up a ticket at the next election. Several conferences were held at which it was agreed: First, that Mr. Manierre should undertake the raising of the debt; second, that a reunion should be called of the members and friends of the association; and third, that a new librarian should be secured.

An attempt was made at a members' meeting to carry a proposition to disband the association, which was vigorously opposed by Cephas Brainerd and the Rev. Dr. Gillet, pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church, then located in Twenty-second Street. It is probable that this motion would have prevailed, but a quorum of active members was not present.

Under Mr. Manierre's leadership the \$2,400 needed was raised. A stirring reunion meeting was held on April twenty-eighth, 1862, regarding which an historic sketch published eight years

later, says: "From this may date a revival of interest in the work of the Society."

When the annual meeting occurred, and the force led by Mr. Brainerd and Mr. Manierre placed a ticket before the advocates of dissolution, with voting strength sufficient to carry their appointment, there was great surprise, and the proceedings took on something of an animated character. The excitement probably did more good than harm in the stimulus it gave to those who had set about rebuilding the organization. The report for the year 1862 says: "The proposal to disband led to an unwonted degree of activity among the remaining members. Our deepest consciousness repelled the thought, and the purpose filled the minds of a little band, who had ever stood by the association, to seek at once the removal of embarrassments, to plant it more firmly on its original basis, and to send it forth afresh on its errand of love."

The leaders looked to the churches for the broad and earnest moral support in the community which was deemed necessary. Reference has already been made to a certain degree of apathy which existed among some clergymen. "It was decided to be indispensable to replace the association in cordial sympathy and co-operation with the pastors and churches." To this end all the pastors of the New York evangelical churches were invited to an eight o'clock tea on June thirtieth, 1862, at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. Nearly fifty clergymen and others were present on this occasion, and in more than twenty addresses new interest and sympathy were pledged

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to the association. The pastors offered their services, their churches, and the contributions of their people. Following this, sermons were preached and collections taken in behalf of the association. The effect was immediate, and a "new spirit once more vitalized the society."

The little group of men who were interested in the association's resuscitation all agreed that a young man, with pluck and energy, must be secured as librarian (the term then used for the employed officer of the association). Mr. Manierre said to his associates: "We must get a new man to take hold in the rooms, and I have just the man for you. I know he will be successful." He relates that in making the change, "the desire was to get a man who would build up the association. We wanted to lay everything on that man."

McBurney was then twenty-six years of age. He was personally known to none of the group but Mr. Manierre, who explained that his knowledge of McBurney's fitness was gained from observation of his powers in Sunday-school work. Mr. Manierre's suggestion was accepted, and the vote for McBurney's appointment was unanimous. Mr. Manierre then sent for McBurney, told him of the situation, the needs of the association, and of his conviction that he was the man to build it up. "At the time," Mr. Manierre writes, "the organization could only give him enough to pay his board." He told McBurney that if at any time an amount was not taken in at the rooms sufficient to make up the \$5.00 per week named as compensation,



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he would personally be responsible for the balance. He was never called on to make good any deficiency.

McBurney said he would gladly take the place. The minutes of the board of directors' meeting of the New York association, under date of July fourteenth, 1862, state, "The committee on rooms reported that they had engaged Mr. McBurney as librarian, at a salary of \$5.00 per week." A pencil memorandum subsequently made on the authority of McBurney, simply says: "Commenced work July eleventh, 1862."

Whether McBurney had been a member of the association prior to this time is uncertain. It is known that he attended its religious meetings, and was active in some features of its religious work. He attended most of the meetings of the association during the discussions in 1856 and 1857 which had nearly broken up the organization.

That he took part in the practical work of the association, appears from this note with the association heading, dated June twenty-fifth, 1862, a few weeks before he became librarian:

ROBERT MCBURNEY, ESQ.

*Dear Sir:*—Your attendance is requested at the Hospital, Lexington Avenue and Fifty-first Street, on Friday, the 27th inst., at 9 o'clock, p.m., to act as watcher. If unable to attend, please notify me. It is understood that your services are gratuitous.

Yours truly,  
(Signed) JAMES S. STEARNS,  
Chairman, Committee on Hospitals.

The minutes for July twenty-eighth, stated: "R. R. McBurney was proposed as a member



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by J. L. Hastie," and subsequent records show that he was duly elected on August twenty-fifth.

Mr. Manierre recalls of him at this time: "McBurney was well acquainted, and had a faculty of making friends. I was convinced he would bring in many new members." He remembers also that the young librarian had much to do with turning the tide of affairs.

A glimpse of the state of things that summer is afforded by a remark in a personal letter written by Frank W. Ballard, July third, 1862: "We are hard at work trying to lift the association out of the slough of despond into which several years of unfortunate management had plunged it, and we hope to do it effectually."

It is significant of McBurney's idea of the association at that time that, at his request, the board passed on July twenty-eighth, its second meeting after his election, a resolution that the librarian be authorized to arrange for a noontday prayer-meeting under the supervision of the committee on rooms. It is also interesting that, as agent of this committee, he was instructed to exclude from the rooms those not entitled to the privileges of the association.

Part of the work included under McBurney's duties was that of janitor. He began his activities as an employee by sweeping out the rooms, which were in a very untidy condition. They were then located in the Bible House. He acted in this capacity until October thirteenth, when the committee on rooms was authorized by the board to hire a janitor to clean the place at a cost not to exceed fifty cents a week.

While McBurney had always had in mind a

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business career, and still cherished it during the two and one-half years of his first connection with the New York association, and while there is little doubt that he looked upon this connection as simply a temporary service, an event occurred shortly after his entrance upon his duties which had a profound influence upon his later life. The year he became librarian of the association, on a holiday, a stranger came into the rooms to spend some leisure hours. McBurney directed his attention to the young man, quickly came into sympathetic conversation with him, learned that he was not a Christian, and before the afternoon was over had led him to accept Jesus Christ as his Saviour. The happiness which this event brought to the young worker made him long to devote his life to Christian work. Later in life he testified that this incident ultimately determined his choice of Christian service as a life work. It is clear, however, that he did not at this time decide to devote his life to the Young Men's Christian Association. Only the most daringly prophetic eye could then see in the association the opportunity for a career. It was only in later years that McBurney surrendered the idea that the secretaryship was a place to be filled for a limited number of years by a man while in the freshness of youth, who only at that age—according to his view—would be attractive to young men. It is said of McBurney that at first he believed a secretary should give way to a successor on attaining the age of thirty; that as he approached that age himself he advanced it to thirty-five; and then adapted his theory to

forty years, as his own maturity demanded such revision. Finally this theory was abandoned. His reluctance to give up this view was due to his life-long belief in young men. When he was nearly sixty years of age, in writing to one of the board of directors at Worcester, Mass., he said: "I thoroughly believe in young men as secretaries. They generally do their best work, and are on their mettle more than older men."

A study of his life shows emphatically that he grew into the work, and himself developed with it. Whatever may have been his views as to the future, and although he left the New York association for a few months, in this experimental and formative period he was unconsciously preparing for his career. It has been said that the men of great and stirring powers, who shape the age in which they live, must first themselves be molded by their times. Somewhat similarly it may be said that the men who accomplish their work through influence upon other characters and the direction of other men must first themselves be influenced and developed by contact with others. Such education McBurney received by coming in contact in his young manhood with a group of strong and leading characters.

This group of men who influenced him, and whom he came himself in time to influence in their activities in behalf of young men, grew in numbers from year to year. In the first year of his association work, two were conspicuous: they were named by Mr. Frank W. Ballard in a private letter dated January, 1863, in which he

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said to a friend, "Manierre and Brainerd are the backbone of the association."

With the revival of the work after the war, a number of the most prominent names in business and philanthropic circles in New York are found in the management of the association. McBurney learned much from these men.

In a memorial address soon after McBurney's death Mr. Brainerd said: "When I met McBurney, and for some time thereafter, the predominating quality which he exhibited was that of diffidence. True, he was kindly, genial, and pleasing, but he was extremely modest and retiring. He was active in Sunday-school work, but I believe he had never spoken in any meeting public in its character. It was probably true that he was willing to take part in the devotional services of his own church, because it was there the custom for all persons to kneel during prayer, and so he could be heard practically from a place of concealment, being hidden by the back of the benches. At that early date he exhibited none of those larger qualities which afterwards distinguished him. He was neither a reader nor a student, and his familiarity with affairs seemed to have come solely from a good knowledge of the moderate business in which he had been engaged as a clerk. From the time of my first acquaintance with him, he rapidly advanced, taking no step backwards to the end. No man I have ever known grew more steadily, or in a more shapely way, than Mr. McBurney. In the largest sense of the words he was a thoroughly self-made man.

"He had a wonderful faculty for the acquisi-

tion of knowledge. All was fish that came to his net. Wherever he was, whatever he was doing, with whomsoever he was, this wonderful acquisitive faculty was in constant operation. What he read, heard, and saw, his strong memory retained, and the quickness of his faculties enabled him to employ as occasion might require, so that he became a wise instructor, a judicious adviser, a thorough executive, an educated man.

“During his early career in the association, there was on its management and upon its committees a group of extremely able, wise, and public-spirited men. Its affairs, the principles upon which it was founded, the work which it could consistently undertake, were thoroughly and carefully discussed by these men. What a school he attended in those earlier days; the educational power of those long discussions of principles, of methods, of ways and means, the interviews with gentlemen whom it was hoped would be interested, can hardly be over-estimated. Few men ever attended so complete an institution for instruction in the qualities and powers which Mr. McBurney afterwards exhibited in such effective fullness.”

Mention has been made of the diversion of much or most of the association's activities into channels created by the war. The appointment of the army committee, out of which grew the Christian Commission, was a notable enterprise. During the years from 1862 to 1863, Cephas Brainerd was chairman of the army and navy committee. This committee under his leadership undertook, in the fall of 1862, to raise a regiment to be composed of Christian men—the

famous 176th New York, popularly known as the Ironsides Regiment. Mr. Ballard says of it in one of his letters in January, 1863: "It was well officered, and comprised a body of men second in character to none of our state regiments that have preceded it. In a religious sense, it is not fully equal to the high standard originally adopted for it, yet even in these respects I hold that no regiment has left the state so well leavened with pious men and true patriots as did the 176th."

The carrying through of this project aroused great enthusiasm in which McBurney deeply shared. He desired to join those who went from the association to the field, and enlisted for the purpose. To his marked disappointment, however, he was rejected on physical grounds.

While the New York association was active in work among the soldiers, McBurney's chief attention was directed to the needs of the young men of the city itself. A statement appears in the report for 1863: "Though we would not relax effort for the soldiers while needed, our minds are thrown back irresistibly upon the claims of the 150,000 young men at our very doors." Through the remainder of the war the home work received steadily increasing attention.

From the time, in the spring of 1862, that Messrs. Stebbins, Brainerd, Manierre, Ballard, and their associates, seconded by the New York clergy, set out to revive the association, conditions and hopes steadily brightened. In January, 1863, Mr. Ballard wrote: "The association is in a healthy state and with good prospects."

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Each succeeding annual report rings with a more encouraging and more gratifying tone. The membership steadily grew, and in this growth McBurney's presence was an important factor. That he was well liked by the young men was remembered by those who knew him at that time. On April eighth, 1863, his salary was raised to \$12.00 a week. The minutes show that this was at his own request. The association showed its appreciation of him, for at the annual election in May of 1863 he was chosen recording secretary, and at the same time he was elected to membership on the board of directors.

In July of 1863, McBurney was put on a committee with Mr. Brainerd for aggressive work in the lower part of the city, and in February of 1864 he was made chairman of the committee to establish a prayer-meeting at the eye and ear hospital. The minutes indicate that, as a member of the board, he took an unhesitating and active part in its proceedings.

Ever since the re-establishment of the association's influence, its leaders had recognized the desirability of re-enlisting the active support of the group of representative young men who had withdrawn on account of the political discussions in 1856 and 1857. Mr. Stebbins, who was again president, had great influence with this body of young men. He, with others, earnestly represented the opportunity for Christian work which the association presented to men of influence. Out of this effort followed meetings at the homes of Messrs. Wm. E. Dodge, Jr., Riley A. Brick, and James Stokes.



These were attended by some "eighty prominent Christian young men," in the main made up of those who had withdrawn on account of the dissensions before the war. The first of these meetings was about to break up without result when Mr. Stokes secured arrangements for another. These meetings resulted in the appointment of a committee to confer with the board of directors. A special meeting of the board was held on March twenty-fourth, 1864, to consider a proposition of union submitted by this committee. Mr. Brainerd and Mr. Stebbins were appointed to confer.

However, one important demand was made by some of the outside group who were dissatisfied with the constitutional basis of membership. There were some who wished to have "the bars let down." They did not wish the control of the organization to be restricted to members of evangelical churches. A compromise agreement was reached on April twenty-first, 1864, when the report of the joint committee on reunion was adopted by the association. The constitution was amended in these words: "Any man of good moral character, under forty years of age, may become, and thereafter continue, an active member by the payment in advance of \$2.00 annually. Active and life members only shall have the right to vote. All officers and directors of the association shall be active or life members and members in good standing of evangelical churches in the city of New York." By this compromise, the former distinction between active and associate members was changed, and for some years the New York as-



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sociation only required that its officers and directors be members of evangelical churches.

Mr. William E. Dodge, Jr., following suggestions by Mr. James Stokes, Jr., wrote out the first list of applications for membership, which was presented and accepted at this meeting. The names were as follows: William C. Martin, G. C. Wetmore, A. P. Sturges, A. D. Shepard, James Stokes, Jr., Thomas Stokes, James W. Pinchot, Theodore Roosevelt, William Walter Phelps, T. A. Perkins, J. Pierpont Morgan, C. A. Miller, Jonathan Marshall, J. Crosby Brown, P. Barns, Jr., R. A. Brick, B. F. Butler, Latimer Bailey, William Harman Brown, W. S. Doughty, N. W. Dodge, Walter Gibson, E. P. Griffin, E. E. Houghwort, Alexander G. Knapp, J. C. Lord, and G. DeF. Lord. Others of the same group followed at later meetings.

At the annual election, in the following month, May, 1864, among the new names on the board of directors were: J. Pierpont Morgan, Jas. Stokes, R. A. Brick, William F. Lee, E. D. Whitney, and William Harman Brown. Mr. Dodge declined election to the board at this time. Mr. Brown and Mr. Morgan were placed on the finance committee, Mr. Stebbins remained as president, and McBurney as recording secretary.

With this reunion began the modern era in the New York association. It brought harmony and new life. It gave an impulse to the development of the work, which makes the year 1864 one of the turning-points in its history. The organization immediately took hold vigorously of projects for improvement. Conspicuous

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among these was a plan, proposed by J. Pierpont Morgan, who pointed out that young men could not be attracted to the old rooms on an upper floor of the Bible House. Under his leadership, the association moved, in the fall of 1864, to attractive apartments rented on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Twenty-second Street. Mr. Morgan followed this by urging the desirability of artistic furniture, and under his influence, the directors, to the surprise of some of them, willingly voted for the expenditure involved in obtaining fine carpets, and in having furniture made especially for the rooms. The membership grew rapidly and steadily thereafter, and the scope of the work was greatly enlarged. Before this year closed, on December fourteenth, by the consent of Mr. Wm. E. Dodge, Jr., to become a director, the association received a factor in its leadership which was to continue until the present time, and which was to make practicable much of the best progress and achievement of the organization.

On the twenty-first of December, Mr. Brainerd as chairman of the rooms and library committee gave notice to the board of directors of the resignation of McBurney as librarian after two and one-half years of service. Statement has once or twice been made to the effect that McBurney withdrew from the secretaryship at this time because some of the board were of the opinion that the association should have a man better fitted to present the work of the society in public meetings. It is true that McBurney was never much given to public speaking. In those early days he seldom spoke on public

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occasions. In later life exceptional incitement was required to call forth his best efforts. When once aroused, however, his oratory was forceful and remarkably effective. It was of the kind which turns the course of conventions — intense, clear, and telling.

His ever-present thought of going into business when a favorable opportunity should present itself was the real explanation of McBurney's resignation in December, 1864. Already, in June, at the recommendation of Mr. Brainerd, his salary had been advanced to \$800, and again, on October twelfth, it had been increased to \$1,000. But he was now in his twenty-eighth year, and believing that a secretary should be a young man, when he was approached by a representative of the Lorillard Company, who offered him a position in Philadelphia, he accepted and sent in his resignation.

During the following months he was far from contented in his business life. Christian work had a stronger hold upon him than he realized, and these months were a period of gloom. Referring to them many years later, in January, 1897, in writing to a young man in business who was thinking of re-entering association work, he said: "Your letter interests me as all letters do from men whom I regard with respect and affection, who are considering the question of their life work. I quite sympathize with you in the dissatisfaction which you have felt since you left association work, having had a like experience many years ago."

In a letter a little later to a secretary who had been called to one of the branches in New York

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City, he wrote: "It is a great deal of a wrench to leave one's field. I know something of it, for I have had personal experience. At one time I deemed it my duty to resign and I did resign, and I spent nights of weariness and pain at leaving the work into which I had thrown all the enthusiasm of my youth, and the city than which no city is more loved by those who live in it. . . . It was a great struggle with me, but I accomplished it, with God's blessing."

In the three months that McBurney was gone from the association, with the exception of a few weeks' trial of another man, the organization was without a secretary. In January the board passed a resolution that it was inexpedient at that time to elect a secretary, but the need of a man for this office was strongly felt. On March fourth, on motion of Mr. Dodge, the executive committee were asked to make it their special work through the succeeding week to secure a secretary. However, they were not successful; and on March twenty-fifth a reception which had been planned was given up until a new secretary should be appointed. Under the same date the board minutes relate that the motion of the executive committee concerning the re-employment of McBurney as secretary was discussed, and it was resolved that the matter be referred to the executive committee with power.

Mr. Brainerd had been in frequent correspondence with McBurney, and had learned that he was not satisfied in his business position. The service in the association had made him restless in any calling which did not directly contribute to winning men to Christ. It cannot now be

## *McBurney's First Years as Secretary*

ascertained whether McBurney was called back to the New York work from Philadelphia, or whether he first relinquished his position and returned to the city. But on April fifteenth, 1865, the minutes state, "That Mr. Brainerd moved the election of Mr. McBurney to the board," and also, "That on his motion Mr. McBurney was elected to the office of recording secretary and librarian." On April seventeenth, McBurney was present at the meeting of the board, and again acted as recording secretary. While the board voted to re-engage McBurney, it is interesting to recall that the executive committee of five, to whom the matter had been referred, were not united in recommending him, three favoring his recall and two opposing it.

One sketch of McBurney's life states that he refused to accept an increase of salary which was offered him as an inducement to return. In a large sense, one of McBurney's eminent qualities was business ability. Mr. William E. Dodge, Sr., is quoted as saying that McBurney "would have made a business man of the first rank." There is no doubt that he had the foresight and executive qualities for business success. He was, however, careless of accumulating money. One of his closest friends has said, "He did not know how to count the pennies, at least for himself. We had to fight to increase his salary." His interest lay emphatically in the direction of religious work, and he returned to the New York secretaryship with singleness of purpose, with new zeal, and an unfaltering determination to devote his life to Christian work. These two and one-half years of service for the New York

## *Life of Robert R. McBurney*

association during the war period were important ones for McBurney. They determined his career as a Christian worker. They awakened in him a desire for service which could not be quenched, and while he was not yet fully equipped for the great work of leadership in the associations, he had passed the first stage of his preparation.

We traced at the beginning of this narrative McBurney's early life and his development as an active Christian worker and a young man in a modest business position in New York City. We then turned aside to study the growth and characteristics of the organization to whose development he was to give his life. In the chapter which now closes we have seen McBurney in his first contact with this organization. We are now to observe how he grew side by side with the work to which he gave his powers. He gave much but it may be said that he received more. He lost his life but he found it many-fold.

## CHAPTER V

### McBURNAY AS SECRETARY DURING THE BUILDING PERIOD FROM 1865 TO 1870

Return to association work marks off a period in McBurney's life distinct from all preceding it. With this began the real development of the association secretaryship as now conceived. It so happened that simultaneously began a definite development in the New York association history which may be characterized as the building movement. Its date properly begins with the election to the presidency of William E. Dodge, Jr., in May, 1865. Gradually in the development of this work, the contact between the secretary and the president nurtured an intimacy and a friendship which grew with the passing years. Mr. Dodge became at once the most prominent member of the board of directors, and it was largely through his influence that the association took a commanding place before the Christian public.

McBurney was henceforth called corresponding secretary, a title which the New York association retained until 1883, long after the term of general secretary had been applied to this officer by the American associations. McBurney's sphere of action renders specific tracing of his share in events difficult. Others took the public parts; his work was through them, from behind the scenes, by in-



direct influence, organizing, suggesting, and directing.

As the work developed, McBurney arranged a careful system for the financial affairs of the association. All funds were passed through the hands of one treasurer, who paid bills only on the order of the chairman of the finance committee.

It was early in this period that McBurney grasped the idea of an all-round work for young men, including the physical as well as the social, intellectual, and spiritual. McBurney related later to one of the New York physical directors (Dr. J. H. McCurdy), that William Wood, who had previously conducted a gymnasium, came to him at about this time and proposed that physical work be taken up under association auspices, and offered his services and gymnasium for this purpose. McBurney then conceived the idea of adding a gymnasium to the association's facilities.

The New York association stood before the country as the leader in work specifically for young men. McBurney became one of the insistent advocates of this singleness of aim. In his first annual report, President Dodge wrote: "Avoiding all side issues or distracting questions, the single aim of all exertion has been how best to reach with kindly sympathy the great number of young men in our city, and to elevate them, morally, socially, and physically, to a true Christian manhood. The work has become more practical and direct as experience has shown what to do and what to avoid."

It was at Philadelphia, during June, 1865,



## *Secretary During Building Period*

that McBurney attended his first International convention. This opened his eyes to the importance of the association movement throughout the country, and marks his introduction into the larger phases of association activity.

But the great work of this period was securing a home for the association. Twice before attempts had been made in this direction. During Professor Crosby's presidency it had been proposed to raise \$50,000 for this purpose, and a later attempt was considered during the war. It was seen by the leaders that the association could not do the great work before it among young men without adequate facilities. While it remained a purely religious endeavor, it might be possible to conduct meetings and Bible classes with a limited equipment, but now that the association was to become an agency for the culture of Christian manhood, for the development of young men in body, mind, and spirit, it was necessary that a suitable building should be provided.

On November twenty-fifth, 1865, Mr. McBurney moved, in the board, "that a committee of five, of which the president shall be one, be appointed to consider and report at the next meeting of the board a plan for a building suitable to the wants of the association, an estimate of its cost, and a scheme for raising the necessary funds." Associated with Mr. Dodge on this committee were Cephas Brainerd, S. D. Hatch, William F. Lee, and William Harman Brown. In a later stage of the development, McBurney became the secretary of the building committee, with Mr. Dodge as chairman, and J. Pierpont

\*Morgan, Cephas Brainerd, and Abner W. Colgate as the other members.

Speaking of McBurney later, Mr. Dodge said: "He put this association on a strong basis. He arranged its organization, which has been a guide for the organization of associations everywhere. He, however, soon found the necessity for a building. The association must have a home, bright and cheerful, full of all sorts of things which would reach young men away from their homes, and help them to keep strong and clear of temptation. This building speaks to some of us very touchingly of McBurney. There is not a room or a corner of it but he designed. It was absolutely a new thing in those days. Every part of it was thought out so kindly and thoroughly that, although finer buildings and grander ones have been built in other places, not one of them was put up without having for its principal arrangement those plans which he devised and which have stood the test of time." It might with almost equal justice be said that Mr. Dodge was himself the builder of this building. It was really an evolution—the work of the secretary, the committee, the board, and the architects, but in it all was the ever-present and guiding influence of McBurney.

In speaking of Mr. Dodge's relation to this building many years later, McBurney wrote to a gentleman in Philadelphia: "It is to the present William E. Dodge that the Young Men's Christian Association (New York) is chiefly indebted for the building which cost \$487,000, of which Mr. Dodge contributed over \$75,000."

To create the sentiment which would make

## *Secretary During Building Period*

possible the securing of the fund for this building, it was found necessary to make a careful study of the lives and habits of the young men of New York City, and the conditions under which they lived. This proved a far-reaching endeavor. It not only awakened the board of directors to the appalling need of work for young men, and so put new zeal into the building movement, but the revelations regarding the temptations which surrounded young men led to the enactment of laws against obscene literature, and the formation of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice.

As a result of this study, a document, which was a contribution of permanent value to sociological investigation, was prepared by Cephias Brainerd and McBurney. Speaking of this in the annual report, Mr. Dodge said: "During the past year many careful investigations have been made as to the number and condition of young men in this city, their employment, their homes, the few means at present for helping and elevating them, and the immense and terrible array of temptations which surround them on every side. The facts arrived at have been so startling as to awaken the greatest interest and surprise. With the greatly increased cost of living during the last few years, the position of young men, crowded in boarding-houses, has become more and more discouraging. Coming mostly from country or foreign homes, friendless and alone in a great city, away from restraint, they have easily and naturally given way to the temptation of finding a substitute for home in the bright, cheery rooms where vice is most at-

tractive. These are almost the only inviting places where they find a free and cordial welcome."

The document referred to was published in February, 1866, under the title of "A Memorandum Respecting New York as a Field for Moral and Christian Effort Among Young Men, Its Present Neglect, and the Fitness of the New York Young Men's Christian Association as a Principal Agency for Its Due Cultivation." An edition of 1,000 copies was privately circulated. The plan adopted in the pamphlet was the presentation of bare facts, which were left the more bare by their arrangement in the form of a syllabus. Some points presented in the first section were: "A male population between the ages of fifteen and forty of 181,592; prominence of strangers; the diversion of attention by employers from the social and moral interests of young men; the general inadequacy of salaries to the cost of living; the increased exclusiveness of society; herding of the virtuous and vicious in boarding-houses to which they were driven by limited incomes." The pamphlet next discussed the injurious influences operating among young men in the city; billiard saloons having 653 tables; thirteen theaters, with an income for four of them of \$665,500 per year; "gambling hells and places on almost every street where lottery tickets and policies might be obtained; 7,786 licensed porter houses and bar-rooms, with a daily consumption of 600 barrels of spirits; obscene books and papers to be obtained at very many newspaper-stands; 223 concert saloons employing 1,191 waiter girls, prostitutes with

few exceptions, attracting 29,900 daily visitors, principally young men; at present, 730 houses of prostitution and assignation, sheltering 3,400 females." The document makes an estimate that the sum of \$4,000,000 is annually expended upon vice. A summary was then made of the inadequate facilities for the moral and religious culture of young men. As to churches, the pamphlet said: "The proportion of young men who attend services is much less than that of any other class of the population. A most inconsiderable number are within the reach of these religious influences. Other causes than mere insufficiency of room operate to restrict the attendance: the exclusiveness, more or less necessary, largely prevailing among the regular attendants of many of the churches; the lack of social feeling and sympathy with young men which has largely increased during the past few years; the cost of sittings in the more attractive churches; the unwillingness of young men to accept charity in the form of mere mission churches; the unattractive character of many others in which the price of sittings is more moderate." The document then urged that the Young Men's Christian Association was the only organization in the city which contemplated the especial field of young men; and after giving a summary of its activities and aims, concludes with an appeal for a building: "But it cannot be supposed that an agency of such possibilities and promise can, when confined to two small rooms, though tasteful and pleasant, in any considerable degree perform the work for the young men of New York which the statements

we have made show to be now most imperatively needed. . . . There are many more young men within the immediate influence of the association than its present resources can in any way fitly provide for. The call which the whole body of young men in this city now makes requires a central building so arranged that rental of portions of it will pay the working expenses of the main organization, so that the annual gifts of the benevolent may be devoted to the support of branch associations in various parts of the city."

In addition to the religious work to be done by the association, this pamphlet clearly states the all-round aim of the association for the body and mind as well as the spirit: "Such a building should plan for the use of the association a commodious lecture-room, a pleasant and well-lighted reading-room, room for a large and well selected circulating library, room for a complete reference library, pleasant conversation rooms, an unexceptionable gymnasium, and other popular means of recreation, and suitable accommodations for religious and literary exercises, and for the committees and officers of the association.

"The prominence which such a structure would give the association and its work, the assurance of permanence, the character and influence which it would then possess in the eyes of strangers, would add immeasurably to the power of the association for good, and silently bring young men within the sphere of its influence."

The consideration of this document in the



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boards of directors led to a considerable discussion of section 5, which was as follows:

“Obscene Books and Papers.—The traffic in this is most extensive. As illustrating the audacity with which this temptation is flaunted in the faces of young men, it may be stated that in one place, on a principal thoroughfare, there are openly exposed for sale two vile weekly newspapers which can be purchased at ten cents a copy, and more than fifty kinds of licentious books, each one illustrated by one or two cuts, at prices ranging from thirty-five to fifty cents, while on each copy there is a catalogue of more than 100 of the same character. If the purchaser manifests a deep interest in the books exposed for sale, the proprietor will show him a catalogue of a large number much more vulgar and atrocious, illustrated with the most obscene cuts, from which selections can be made. The debasing influences of these publications on young men cannot be estimated. They are feeders for brothels.”

As a result of discussion, on February twenty-fourth, 1866, it is recorded in the minutes of the board of directors: “Moved by Mr. McBurney that a committee of three be appointed to examine and report as to the matter of obscene literature.” Messrs. Chas. E. Whitehead, Cephas Brainerd, and James H. Fay were appointed on this committee.

In developing the building movement, it seemed desirable to secure some changes in the act of incorporation, and to arrange for a board of trustees. Accordingly, on March seventh, it is recorded in the minutes of the board, as in-

roduced by McBurney, "That a committee of three be appointed to prepare a plan for the organization of a board of trustees of the proposed building for the association, to draft a charter for the same, and also to draft a charter for the special incorporation of the association." Three days later it was moved by McBurney "that Messrs. Whitehead and Brainerd proceed to Albany to secure the passage of the act of incorporation for the association, and also the passage of a saloon bill, and a bill on the suppression of obscene literature." At this meeting a committee, of which McBurney was one, was appointed to interest the clergy in the building movement. The act of incorporation of the Young Men's Christian Association of the City of New York was passed on April third, 1866.

In making some changes in the constitution in connection with the reincorporation, at Mr. Dodge's suggestion the word *physical* was inserted in the statement of purpose, making the section read: "The object of this association shall be the improvement of the spiritual, mental, social, and physical condition of young men." This was the first constitution to formulate what has since been called the fourfold work of the association.

The bill for the suppression of obscene literature was prepared and presented to the legislature, but disappeared from the table on the last day of the session when it was about to be acted upon. It finally became a law through association effort at a subsequent session.

The struggle for the securing of funds for the new building began in earnest in the



spring of 1866. The amount required seemed a prodigious figure in those days, and the determination to secure it involved faith and the exercise of strenuous, manly qualities. McBurney himself says of it: "The erection of a building involving such a large outlay was a heroic undertaking. The position taken by Mr. Dodge and his associates, owing to the public confidence in their sound judgment and business experience, at once arrested the attention of the commercial and Christian public and impressed upon them the importance of the mission of the Young Men's Christian Association. The large contributions which these gentlemen made toward the building gave additional proof of their confidence." On March twenty-eighth, 1866, a special meeting of the board was held, whose object, as stated by President Dodge, was "to consider the propriety of the raising of a fund of \$250,000 for the purchase of lots and the erection of a building." The minutes of the meeting stated that it was "moved by McBurney that we immediately take steps to raise \$250,000, subscriptions, to be binding when \$200,000 is pledged."

In the canvass for the funds, the association had the liberal aid of the New York press. The annual report presented in the spring of 1866 the names of eighteen influential papers which had published leading articles regarding the association's need of a building.

In less than a month after the meeting named, President Dodge reported four subscriptions of \$10,000 each, and before the end of April, the amount had reached \$46,000. In No-

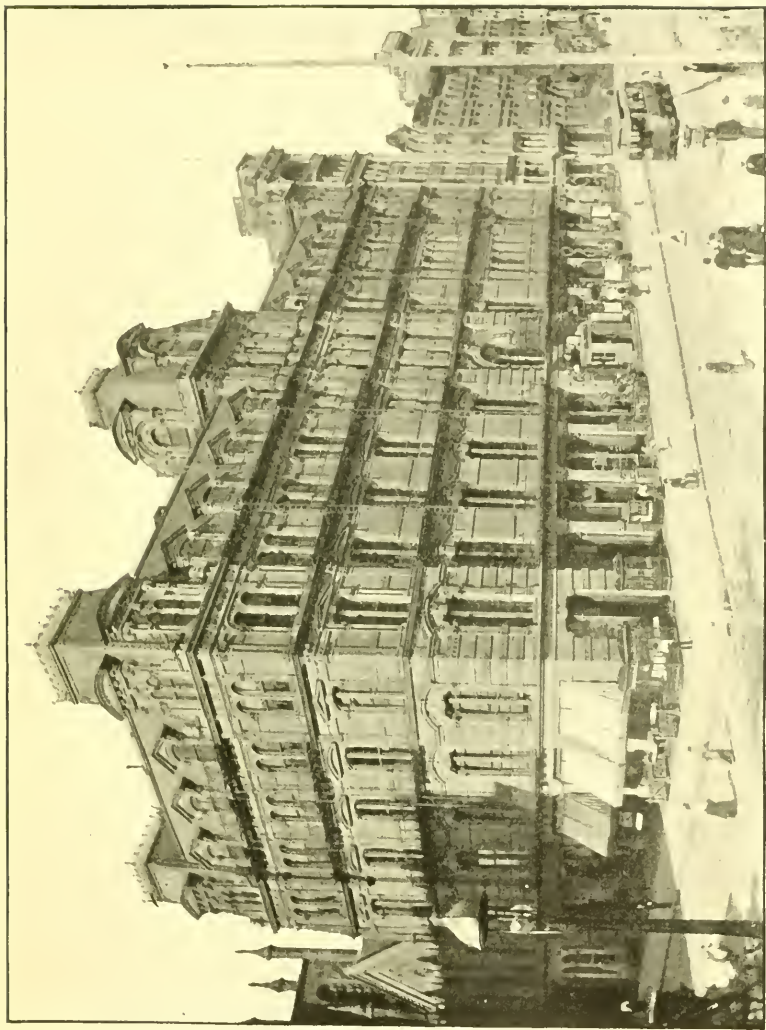
vember, committees were appointed to obtain prices and estimates on lots, and to bring in further subscriptions. Early in December, the subscriptions had amounted to \$185,990, and the time seemed to have arrived for the appointment of the building trustees called for by the act of incorporation. This board was appointed on December tenth, 1866, and consisted of William E. Dodge, Jr., Frederick Marquand, Jonathan Sturges, Stewart Brown, Robert L. Kennedy, Charles C. Colgate, James K. Place, R. L. Stuart, and James Stokes.

The search for suitable property on which to build was a long one, and a number of different proposals were made. On February twenty-seventh, 1867, the board decided to purchase, for \$142,000, the lots at the corner of Twenty-third Street and Fourth Avenue.

During the years 1867 and 1868, strenuous effort was devoted to completing the building fund, and to working out in detail the plans of the new structure, and superintending its erection. Ground was broken January thirteenth, 1868, and the cornerstone was laid on October thirty-first of the same year. The formal laying of the stone was done by President William E. Dodge, Jr.,\* who said: "I lay this corner-stone in the name of the board of trustees and the board of directors of the association, for the improvement of the mental, social, physical, and spiritual condition of young men."

The building was completed in November, 1869. It had cost for the lot \$142,000, for the

\*Seventeenth Annual Report New York Young Men's Christian Association, page 59.



TWENTY-THIRD STREET BUILDING.



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structure \$345,000, a total of \$487,000. Of this sum, \$202,000 was still to be provided. It was decided to put a mortgage upon the property, amounting to \$150,000, and to seek to raise the remaining \$52,000 at once.

The opening of the building attracted great attention, not only in New York City, but throughout the association world. A private view was given to contributors and friends of the association on the evening of November twenty-ninth, at which addresses were made by William E. Dodge, Jr., Morris K. Jesup, and others. On this occasion \$30,000 were pledged toward the debt. On November thirtieth, a concert was given to secure funds to pay for a grand piano and the pipe organ. The tickets were sold under subscription, and ample funds for this purpose secured. The most brilliant feature was the formal dedication which occurred on December second, 1869, in the hall of the association. This hall was filled to overflowing, and hundreds who could not gain admission thronged the other parts of the building which were thrown open for inspection. On the platform were seated many distinguished guests, among them several who made addresses during the evening: Hon. Schuyler Colfax; Hon. J. T. Hoffman, governor of New York; Major-General O. O. Howard of the United States Army; George H. Stuart of Philadelphia; and William E. Dodge, who presided. Congratulatory telegrams were received from the associations at Brooklyn, Baltimore, and Montreal, and from the state convention then assembled at Columbus, Ohio. Letters were read from Secretary

Fish, ex-Governor Seymour, and ex-Governor Buckingham of Connecticut.

In this project, New York began the modern association building movement. There were already twelve structures owned by associations in other fields, but only three of these had been erected for association purposes. At Ryde, England, in 1864, an association building was erected, in which the chief idea was a library, and around this thought the whole building centered. At Chicago, in 1866, the first building in the United States built especially for a Young Men's Christian Association was erected; but this, too, was specialized in its purpose, and consisted chiefly of an immense evangelistic hall. Its leading idea was a place for religious gatherings and platform effort. In fact, the Chicago and New York buildings stood for the two ideals of association effort, which at this time and for ten years later struggled for a mastery of the American association policy. The one stood for a general evangelistic endeavor for all classes which made revival meetings prominent, the other for the specializing of the work of the association upon young men, and the providing of agencies and methods particularly adapted to that class. McBurney stood out with pugnacious energy as the champion of this specialized, organized work for young men in contrast with the general evangelistic work for all classes, which found expression in the evangelistic hall of the Chicago association.

The third specially erected association building was in the Far West, in the city of San Francisco. This more nearly approached the



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all-round idea of association work than any preceding it. It was dedicated November sixteenth, 1869, two weeks before the dedication of the New York structure. The striking feature about this building was that it contained a gymnasium as well as provision for the social, intellectual, and spiritual needs of young men. The adoption of the idea of including a gymnasium in the association building occurred in San Francisco long after it had been proposed by the New York board, and it was only because the San Francisco building was a smaller enterprise, which took less time to complete than the half-million dollar New York structure, that it was opened earlier. An examination of the plans of the San Francisco building shows that it lacked the idea of unity which was the distinctive feature of the New York edifice.

This feature, which made the plans of the New York association building the model for the association architecture of the future, was the reception-room or lobby into which every one entering the building must come, and from which various exits led in seven directions to the different departments of the edifice. In this reception-room was the public office of the secretary. Every visitor was obliged to pass within sight of his desk in going in or out of the building. Near the desk was a door leading into the secretary's private office. From this central room one stepped by one doorway into the large, well lighted reading-room; by another, into the pleasant recreation-room, where checkers and chess and other games were provided; by another, into the tastefully furnished parlors; by

another, into the lecture-room. Near the door was the coat-room; at one side a stairway led down to the gymnasium, bath-rooms, and bowling-alleys; another stairway led up to the library and the numerous educational class-rooms. Across the hall, opposite the reception-room, was a large auditorium, which would accommodate some 1,200 people. This was the only room in the building which could be reached without passing by the secretary's desk, and it was so arranged in order that it might be rented for public gatherings, and yet not interfere with the routine work of the association. Thus, the secretary at his desk was enabled to control all the activities which went on in this large building. This central room was McBurney's chief contribution to the association building movement. It made possible the grouping of the various agencies of the association—physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual—under one roof and under one control. The secretaryship, it has been said, was created by McBurney. The New York building was certainly, in its design, significant of the secretary's central place in the association. The building movement and the secretaryship have developed together.

Writing of this building in a letter in 1894, McBurney said: "The Twenty-third Street building marked the most important epoch in the history of the Young Men's Christian Association in this country. Prior to that time, associations were in small rooms in obscure parts of cities, and had neither the confidence of the business community on the one hand, nor the support of the clergy on the other. . . .



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The Twenty-third Street building, opened in 1869, was the first building representing the modern idea—the American idea—of Young Men's Christian Association work. In England, where the association was founded, the methods were spiritual, and to an exceedingly limited extent, educational; but Mr. William E. Dodge recognized that if the Young Men's Christian Association was to accomplish for the young men of America what they needed, the whole man must be included—physical, mental, and social, as well as spiritual. As a result, the Young Men's Christian Associations of America, following the example of the New York association, recognize, as no other band of associations in the world recognize, the fourfold character of the association work."

The New York association had come distinctly to recognize its position of leadership in the association movement at large, even before it entered the building on Twenty-third Street. The Albany Convention, of 1866, had located the international committee for three years in New York City. In the report for 1868, Mr. Dodge had remarked: "There are now more than 500 associations like our own in America. With its business relations to the country, New York is looked up to as the leader in this good work in a great measure, and everything done here is duplicated in many other places." In the new building an office was appropriated for the secretary of the international committee, which became the headquarters for that work. President Dodge said: "We hope to render our rooms a home for the association workers of

all parts of the country." The period which closed with December, 1869, brought the building, and completed the establishment of the New York work.

For some years McBurney had leaned towards the ministry as a field of labor for his maturer years. While the association building was under way, he remarked to a friend that he had some thought, although then nearly thirty-three years of age, of studying for pulpit work. He said: "Very soon I will be too old for the secretaryship, and too old to help young men, and they will want to get rid of me." Through some of his Methodist friends, he was offered the secretaryship of one of the church boards having headquarters in New York. But after considering these various lines of activity, he was led by the solicitation of his friends in the association to remain as secretary in the building which he had done so much to establish.

During these years in which the building project was being carried forward, McBurney lived at the home of Cephas Brainerd at No. 190 East Nineteenth Street. Through life his relations with the senior member of the board of directors were intimate and mutually influential. Mr. Brainerd's companionship was important in arousing McBurney's intellectual life. Speaking of this period in McBurney's career, Mr. Brainerd said: "He grew steadily and rapidly to be a large and general reader. He was not systematic in this; indeed, he would be called a miscellaneous reader—novels, travels, polemics, poetry, and especially hymns. Nor did he neglect either the religious or secular

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papers. Not only did he read consecutively, but he also read by scraps. He could save a few minutes wherever he might tarry by reading the book which was just at hand, and in all he was attentive to what he was doing."

This period of five years, from 1865 to 1870, during which the New York building was secured, was full of significance for McBurney. If the earlier period made him a Christian worker, it was this period which made him a general secretary. In the hard struggles of the building campaign, McBurney grew in power and leadership. He emerged from this campaign mature, tried, masterful, and triumphant. He had felt the burden of responsibility, and at the same time he had also secured the confidence which comes with success. He was now near the end of his thirty-third year; he had a grasp, as hardly any other man had, of the problems and needs of the Young Men's Christian Association; he was in a position to give his whole time and energy to the solution of those problems; he was in the largest city of the New World, in the best equipped building, with the most active and best organized Young Men's Christian Association in existence; he had found his life work, and he devoted himself to it henceforth with all his powers.

## CHAPTER VI

### MCBURNEY AS SECRETARY IN THE TWENTY-THIRD STREET BUILDING, 1870-1887

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FOURFOLD WORK—THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST VICE—THE MOODY MEETINGS—THE ORGANIZATION OF BRANCHES

For seventeen years Robert McBurney was the general secretary of the association located in the building on the corner of Twenty-third Street and Fourth Avenue. During this period two great features characterized the New York work:

The first was the internal development of a systematic, large-minded, forceful, and specialized work for the culture of Christian young manhood, along the comprehensive lines already conceived for the entire man—body, mind, and spirit.

The second was the organization of branches in different parts of the city, and for different classes of young men.

There were also two important general enterprises during this period in which McBurney took a conspicuous part: one, the attack upon the sale of obscene literature, and the other the great evangelistic campaign in New York conducted by Dwight L. Moody.

The form of government during this period was similar to that followed in London, which may be spoken of as a parental type. The chief

## *In the Twenty-third Street Building*

authority was the association in the Twenty-third Street building, under the direction of one board of directors. The directors of the central association not only conducted its affairs, but exercised a supervision over the other branches.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of this period was the perfecting of the all-round work for young men. The New York association was only one with others seeking to solve this problem, but in this it bore a leading part.

To appreciate the situation at the beginning of 1870, it must be remembered that the building then in hand, and the complicated work which it expressed, was a novelty, something distinctly new before the world, and new to the activities of the church. Upon McBurney, as the personal exponent of the secretaryship, devolved the task of giving to the public mind, always slow in comprehending innovation, a full consciousness of the new idea. McBurney did this not through pamphlets or public speeches but through executive demonstration. He expressed himself institutionally. How much of an innovation he was himself is suggested by Mr. W. W. Hoppin, when in his memorial address, after McBurney's death, he said: "I remember my first visit to the rooms years ago in the absence of McBurney. There did not seem to be anything to them. The secretary did not know what it was to be a secretary. His was a service of perfunctory duty of keeping rooms open and pamphlets on hand. But McBurney found out what young men needed." He showed a vivid appreciation of what was demanded in a

work to draw young men. He competed successfully for their interest with the strong commercial and aggressive agencies for evil. He contended always for all the attractiveness for the building which any commercial institution might employ. He asked for entrance lights on the streets, for pleasant furnishings, for cheeriness throughout; he even went on his own personal responsibility when necessary beyond the cautious ideas of older men. The international convention had some years previous declared against all forms of amusement in the association. McBurney, deeming it important to have certain games placed in the rooms, and doubtful of the action of the board, had the games provided, and passed upon in auditing as furniture. The spirit of the fourfold work, as developed under his direction, was attractiveness and usefulness. He wished to gain the individual for the association, and then help him in some useful way. He was always opposed to introducing billiards and games of chance as being harmful in their associations, and likely to bring young men into temptation; but he was the most hearty advocate of a social, fraternal atmosphere in the association, and believed that this should permeate the whole life of the institution.

The influence of the New York association as a resort is illustrated by an incident recalled by Miss Jordan, who was McBurney's private secretary during the latter years of his life. She relates:

“Until the year 1863 the association rooms were always closed on holidays, but on Christmas of that year Mr. McBurney was feeling



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very sad and lonely and homesick. Only a short time before he had heard of the death of his father in Ireland, and on this home day the sense of his great loss came to him very keenly. Most of us are selfish even in our grief, but his thought was that perhaps in that great city there was some other fellow who was sad and lonely, and perhaps he might drift into the association rooms, and maybe they could help each other, so he opened the rooms as usual. Sure enough there did appear a young English sailor boy, whom Mr. McBurney showed around the rooms and welcomed in the cordial way that so many thousands will remember. When dinner-time came they dined together, and the young fellow was so melted that he just opened his heart, told Mr. McBurney what a wild, wayward son he had been, and showed a letter from his father in which the old man declared he could stand no more, he had been so disgraced. We can imagine the talk that followed, and the boy before he left had made up his mind to lead a different life. Every day, as long as his ship remained in port, he came into the association rooms, but finally the ship sailed, and Mr. McBurney never saw him again.

“Ten years later, at the time of the meeting of the evangelical alliance, among the many delegates from foreign lands were two English clergymen, whom Mr. McBurney started to show around the building. On learning their names, one seemed strangely familiar to him, and he remembered that it was the same as the young English sailor, from whom he had received no word for ten years. He mentioned the fact, and

the gentleman bearing the same name seemed very much interested and asked a number of questions, finally confessing that the young man was his son, and that he had since then been lost overboard at sea, but, he added, from that day, that Christmas day, he had never caused his family one anxious thought, so completely had his life changed.

“And this was the reason the New York association adopted the policy of having its rooms open every day of the year.

Miss Jordan also relates :

“There came in one day at the old office at forty East Twenty-third Street a good-looking young man, whom, for a wonder, Mr. McBurney could not recall, but it was not surprising when the young man told his story, something like this. He said that a number of years before he came to America from England, and though brought up in a Christian home, he, like many others, commenced to drift until he had become perfectly indifferent to any claims that his Heavenly Father had upon him. One night, walking listlessly down Twenty-third Street, he noticed the sign of the association at Twenty-third Street and Fourth Avenue—it was before that department was made a branch, and while Mr. McBurney was still secretary there—and more to escape the inclemency of the weather than anything else walked up the stairs and into the reception-room. He was surprised at the warmth of the welcome given him by one of the assistants who met him at the door and then passed him on to Mr. McBurney. With his usual quickness of vision Mr. McBurney soon

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found what the young man needed more than anything else, and it was not many minutes before the three—the young man, Mr. McBurney, and the assistant—were on their knees together in the secretary's room off the reception-room, and the young man went forth with new purpose in life. As the young man himself said, as nearly as I can remember his language, 'Mr. McBurney, I went out of that room resolved to lead a Christian life, and as time went on I felt that I was called to preach the gospel in mission lands, so I took a course in a training school for missionaries, and after finishing that, felt that my usefulness would be greatly enhanced if I could minister to the bodies of my hearers as well as to their souls, so I have been through a medical college, am now under appointment from the Methodist board, and next week sail as a medical missionary to Corea.' The young man did go to Corea, and as regularly as to his church board did he send monthly accounts of his work to Mr. McBurney, the last report having come only a few days before Mr. McBurney passed away."

It was his ambition that the association should have a hearty, attractive atmosphere, which he believed would have a strong influence over young men.

The gymnasium was first thought of as a means of attraction for drawing young men into the building, though its importance was soon recognized as a means of promoting the health and physical development of young men, and leading to purity of life. The introduction of the gymnasium into the New York association

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led to the development of this as a department of association work throughout the country. Gradually McBurney and other leaders came to recognize that city life did not furnish the opportunities for bodily exercise and physical development for which young men formerly found opportunity in the open air and upon the farm. Instead of developing the physique, the city with its indoor life and excitement tended to develop mental and nervous activity. The gymnasium, by developing the body, performed an important ministrations to young men. Physical directors also found themselves in position to deal with young men in the examining room in an effective way regarding impurity of life. A bowling alley and abundant bathing facilities also became a feature of this department.

Mr. William Wood became teacher of the classes in gymnastics, which for a time were scheduled with the classes in German, French, bookkeeping, and writing. Mr. Wood served in this capacity throughout this period. He contributed largely towards the development of the association's physical work for young men.

The annual report for 1870, which appeared a few weeks after the opening of the gymnasium, December second, 1869, speaks of the gymnasium and bowling alley as follows: "These have proved far greater attractions to young men than it was supposed they would, although hopes were somewhat sanguine upon this point. The classes are largely attended, indeed, larger ones could hardly be accommodated. Very many members of the association are also to be

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found in the gymnasium for purposes of exercise who are not connected with the classes. It has been thought necessary, in order to secure a rigid observance of established rules, to form a sub-committee whose duty shall be not only to see that all rules are enforced, but to do all in their power to promote the usefulness of these agencies."

Previous to the erection of the New York building, the associations throughout the country had provided opportunities for the intellectual development of young men. This work was now to assume systematic and definite shape through the evening educational classes. Early in 1868, a class in French had been opened, free to members of the association. With the opening of the new building, increased opportunities were offered for various classes. During the early months of 1870, instruction was given in German, French, bookkeeping, and writing. For the development of this work, a trust fund of \$5,000 was given by Mr. James Stokes, Jr.

The growth of this department, however, was slow, for in January, 1874, McBurney says of the classes: "It is safe to say that no institution presents a better corps of teachers, more thoroughly in sympathy with the purposes it is designed to accomplish, and yet the young men of the association do not avail themselves of the advantages presented as it was hoped they would. None of the classes is fully attended." But with the year 1875 a marked improvement began. In the report covering that year McBurney says: "Classes are now conducted in German, French, Spanish, bookkeeping, writing,

and vocal music. The attendance at the classes has been much larger than in any former year. From October first to December twentieth, 635 students were enrolled. The largest attendance was 430, and the average 292."

At the close of this period, in 1887, this work had become greatly developed. McBurney states: "At four points forty-one evening educational classes in fifteen different branches of study are being held. Each class meets from one to three times each week during seven months of the year. The number of students enrolled in these forty-one classes is 1,679 different young men. This evening college of the association is educating these young men for greater usefulness in their business life. Few, if any, American universities or colleges contain so many students."

Ever since entering the association in 1862, McBurney had had a deep interest in the development of the library. It was his especial pride. He was called to the organization as its librarian. This department during most of the association's history was under the supervision of Mr. Cephas Brainerd. It also owes its development largely to the efforts of Mr. Robert Hoe. When the new building was entered, a great impetus was given to this feature of the association. The report shows that at this time there were 276 current newspapers and magazines on file in the reading-room, and 3,500 volumes in the library. A notable addition was made to the library in 1873 by a gift of \$3,100 by William Niblo, which was expended in creating the Niblo Collection. Frequent additions were

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made to this by Mr. Niblo during his lifetime, and at his death, in 1879, he made the association library his residuary legatee. The amount bequeathed to the association was \$147,409. The development of the library and the evening classes during this period placed the New York association in a high rank among the educational endeavors of the city. McBurney was at first interested in the library chiefly because it was an attraction to young men, and he believed that good books would be useful in helping young men to better ways of thinking and living. The growth of this library, however, under the supervision of a committee of educated men, greatly stimulated McBurney's interest in books and reading. Through Mr. Reuben B. Poole, the librarian, and the examination of the books as they were purchased, McBurney became widely acquainted with the various branches of human knowledge, and was led to read and study, and later to purchase books for himself.

The religious work undertaken at the Twenty-third Street building, and at the various branches during this period, was of a threefold character, religious meetings for men, classes in Bible study, and various forms of personal work. McBurney believed that the religious meetings of the association should be chiefly of an evangelistic character, and he rejoiced greatly in the constant stream of young men who came to these meetings at the association building. There came to be conducted, on Sunday afternoon, a most tactfully arranged series of services, at which the gospel was pre-



sented in a welcome and manly way to young men.

Writing, in 1885, to a prominent clergyman in St. Louis who had criticised the New York association as being chiefly a social club, McBurney said: "We press our religious work in this association with all the vigor in our power, and it is exceedingly difficult for an unconverted man to leave one of our meetings without a direct effort being made in his behalf. At all our meetings a personal invitation is given to all who desire to find Christ as a personal Saviour, to signify it by raising the hand. But we do not rest there. As men pass out of our meetings, if we do not know them, we ask them if they are believers, and if not, we endeavor to detain them and point them to Christ. I am not acquainted with a religious organization, mission, or church in this city or in any other place where such vigorous spiritual effort is put forth to win men to Jesus Christ. We have the following services: Sunday morning 9:30 Bible class for beginners in the Christian life, which I always lead—the average attendance is forty-five; at 4 o'clock a medical students' prayer-meeting, at which some hopeful conversions have occurred, and from which eight men have gone out as medical foreign missionaries—average attendance forty-four; at 5 o'clock during six months of the year we have a Bible class in our large hall with an average attendance of 400; during the summer months a Bible class for young men exclusively is held at the same hour in the parlors, with an average attendance of ninety-four; at 6:30 p. m. we hold a prayer-



meeting for young men in the parlors, with an average attendance of ninety-three; we have devotional meetings for young men on Thursday and Saturday evenings at 8 o'clock, with an average attendance of fifty-seven and fifty-six respectively; on Tuesday evening our training class in Bible study meets, with an average attendance of twenty—the number of attendants is limited; the object is to train young men who attend it in the use of the Word of God with inquirers. A youths' meeting is held every Friday, with an average attendance of twenty-one. We also hold a prayer-meeting in our parlors every afternoon at four o'clock, excepting Sunday and Saturday, and evening prayers in the parlors every night at a quarter to ten, which we call family worship. Every morning of the week, except Sunday, the employees of the association meet in my office for prayer in relation to our work."

After speaking of the special efforts of the association during the week of prayer and the work of the branches, McBurney said: "This work is not mine, but the Lord's, and the increase has been from him. I believe no more in the Young Men's Christian Association being made a moral club than you do in your church being made such a club. I have given up my life to work for the Lord in connection with this agency as you have given up yours to the work of the ministry, not for the building up of a social club, but for the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ among young men."

The Sunday afternoon Bible class was later turned into a gospel meeting for men, and a

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luncheon for workers and strangers was served at 6:30 o'clock in the evening, at which earnest testimonies for Christ were often given by visitors or invited guests.

A warm spiritual life was generated in the New York association under such leadership. McBurney was especially tactful as a personal worker, and was a master in leading others into this service.

Henry Webster was one of the notable figures of these years of McBurney's history. Seeking for an assistant secretary, who was a college graduate, and socially inclined, McBurney learned from a friend that Webster would be a desirable man. He was persuaded to accept this position in 1877. Two years of hard desk work at the Twenty-third Street rooms broke down his health, and he resigned to go into business. He was employed by a New York company with such freedom of time that he was enabled to devote his mornings and evenings to winning men. For eleven years, until his death, in 1891, he devoted his life unremittingly to this end, chiefly at the Twenty-third Street building. His whole aim and study was to bring himself into helpful contact with the largest number of young men and lead them into the Christian life. He frequently conducted the after-meetings on Sunday afternoons, and there are many hundreds of young men who came to decisions in these meetings who were led into the Christian life by Henry Webster. He was a type of a considerable group of young men who were inspired by McBurney to Christian service.

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McBurney was constantly finding opportunities to have personal conversations with young men regarding their spiritual welfare, and he frequently followed these conversations up with personal letters. Here is a letter he wrote to a young man whom he was seeking to influence: "July second, 1885. Dear Friend: I am free to say that I feel an interest in your welfare, and believe that you have within you the making of a good man, if you are careful. You ought to address yourself to the learning of some business, and work like a tiger at it—stick to it. You are at just the age where, humanly speaking, you have the making or breaking of yourself in your own hands. They talk of men being the architects of their own fortunes. What is far more important, we are the architects to a very great extent of our own character, and after all character is everything; fortune without it is valueless, for if a man's gains are ill-gotten, the enjoyment that comes from them is full of gall and bitterness. If you are going to make a success of life really, you cannot do it without God's help. Everything in your life is going to depend upon the relations which you sustain to our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. If you trust him, make him your friend by giving him the confidence of your heart, studying his character and imitating his example, you will be a blessing to yourself and to everybody with whom you come in contact. But if you attempt to build up character without his help, your efforts will prove a failure. Begin in a manly way by recognizing your relation to God, the author of your being, and to his Son, who is God manifest in the flesh,

and all will be well for this life and for the life which shall have no end. I am your friend and well wisher."

McBurney always showed a strong sense of the importance of the personal element in organization. He appealed for an aggressive individuality, and exhorted men to assume responsibility. Shortly after entering the new building, in a little leaflet called "A Model Association," he said: "Would that we could truthfully call our own loved association such in every respect. In its building, with all its appliances for the prosecution of its work, in organization and the like, we believe it is unequalled. In its influence upon sister associations, many say it stands unrivaled, but in an all-absorbing devotion on the part of every single member, we know it is sadly lacking. Think of the results if every one of our active members should become, through God's blessing, a model member. You should study to speak to men with all the winsomeness of manner of which you may be possessed. Men are as responsible for how they say things as for what they say. Let us remember that our manner often, yes generally, produces a deeper impression than the words we utter, especially in casual intercourse with others."

Upon the covers of McBurney's reports is a notice which shows his eagerness to help young men: "Young men in trouble and desiring friendly advice on any question are cordially invited to call on the secretary at his office in the association building, or address him by letter." Even as the cares of administration

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increased, he was always alert to help men personally.

But while McBurney was interested in evangelistic work, he came to believe even more deeply in the teaching of the Word of God as the chief means for developing spiritual life, and even for leading unconverted men to accept the truth.

In 1871, during a visit to London, McBurney became acquainted with W. E. Shipton, the secretary of the parent association, and witnessed his method of conducting a conversational evangelistic Bible class. Later, in 1874, when Mr. W. Hind Smith, of England, visited America, largely as a result of the impetus given by him to Bible study, McBurney began teaching the Bible in earnest. For many years he conducted one of the large Bible classes at the Twenty-third Street association.

He was particularly successful in using the Bible class as a means of bringing to unconverted young men a sense of sin and their need of Christ. Mr. Brainerd speaks of him thus: "Those who attended his Bible classes know how well he was prepared to meet them. He did not confine his study to what I may call the stock or common expositions of the Scripture. He compared Scripture with Scripture, the orthodox view with the view of the extremist on the one side or the other. A part of his study was the geography of the country, the times in which the Scriptures were written, and the people and things which pertain to these times, as disclosed by modern research. Few men even in the clerical profession were so com-

pletely in possession of adequate knowledge for personal profit, or for the instruction of others, as was Mr. McBurney. He accepted the Scriptures as the Word of God, but with no blind or unchallenging faith, for all assaults upon that Word he tested and weighed, but the result was still an unshaken faith, unwavering confidence, and unyielding trust. In all, through all, and over all, was his personal faith and personal love for God, for his Son, and belief in the power, the pervasive and constant presence of the Holy Spirit. He believed in prayer, and in answer to prayer, and he knew whereof he believed. He was constant from the beginning to the end to the purpose and aim of his life—the advancement of the cause of Christ among young men.”

We turn now to consider two enterprises in which McBurney was deeply interested during this period: the organization of the society for the suppression of vice, and the evangelistic campaign by Dwight L. Moody.

Reference has been made to the surprise and indignation with which the board of directors of the association discovered, as early as 1866, the extent to which the obnoxious traffic in obscene literature was being carried on in New York city. Through the efforts of the association in 1868, a law had been enacted at Albany against this traffic. This law, however, did not cover all of the nefarious business as then organized and systematically carried on. A few convictions were secured, and several dealers were driven from the business, but in 1871 the traffic was carried on more openly than ever before.

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The association resolved to prosecute in all legal forms a class of offenders so closely affecting young men.

About this time, without any knowledge of what the association was undertaking, Mr. Anthony Comstock, who was then a commission salesman in a large dry-goods establishment, had his attention called to this evil by the effects he saw it had produced upon persons with whom he was acquainted. In 1868 he prosecuted, on his own responsibility, a man in Warren Street, who was convicted in the courts. "Early in 1872," Mr. Comstock says (statement by Anthony Comstock made October twenty-ninth, 1900), "the appalling fact was revealed to me that there was an organized business, systematically carried on, where 169 books were openly advertised in circulars, and in connection with them there was also advertised pictures and articles for immoral purposes of the worst description. I discovered the names of the publishers of the majority of these books. The facts overwhelmed me. After making several arrests, I wrote a letter of appeal to Mr. McBurney, at the Young Men's Christian Association, stating some of the facts which I had discovered, and asking for assistance. I was then a green country boy. I wrote my letter in pencil, and I wrote, I suppose, so hastily that Brother McBurney had hard work to make out the letter. As he was a busy man, he returned the letter to me to be rewritten. Then he said he would bring it before his committee. In the mean time, however, Mr. Morris K. Jesup, who had become the president of the association, and whom I had never



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seen up to that time, happened to see this letter on Mr. McBurney's desk. He came to the store where I worked and I had a personal interview with him. As a result of that interview, Mr. Jesup invited me to meet Mr. McBurney and himself at his home on Madison Avenue. At that meeting I disclosed the facts that I had discovered. I said that I thought if I had a little money I could get at the stock of the publishers. As I had been put to some considerable expense both of time and money, Mr. Jesup directed Mr. McBurney to send me a check for \$650, which I received the following day. One hundred and fifty dollars was to reimburse me for the time and outlay already made, and \$500 to be employed to unearth the publishers, and to secure if possible their stock. By the expenditure of the \$450, I secured nearly \$50,000 worth of books, stereotyped plates and engravings. The other \$50 I returned to Mr. McBurney."

This resulted, on the part of the association, in the appointment of a committee for the suppression of vice. The members of this committee were Jacob F. Wyckoff, William F. Lee, Cephas Brainerd, Charles E. Whitehead, Thatcher M. Adams, William H. S. Wood, Morris K. Jesup, and Robert R. McBurney. This committee determined to engage in a still-hunt campaign against this iniquitous business, and secured Anthony Comstock to carry it on without it being publicly known at the time under whose auspices he was operating. In the prosecution of this work, the committee raised and expended \$8,498.14.



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This work was conducted until January, 1874, when "the amount of time and labor necessary for its prosecution, and its manifest importance, led the board of directors to draft a bill for the incorporation of a society to be especially charged with the suppression of this traffic. This society became organized under the name of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, and Anthony Comstock became its secretary."

Not only was McBurney actively sympathetic with the movement just described, but he was deeply interested in efforts for social purity, and it was out of his championship of this work as a department of association activity, that he encountered one of the keenest disappointments of his life.

Before the close of the period now under review, the New York association organized a White Cross Society among its members, with Henry Webster as chairman. Speaking of this, McBurney, in 1885, said: "A corps of the White Cross Army for the promotion of personal purity among young men was formed February nineteenth under the management of a committee of the association. It numbers 567. Many excellent results have been secured. We wish that every young man in this city might feel, as many have already felt, the restraining and uplifting influence of this work, and be so impressed with its importance as to seek, as these have done, through a surrender of their hearts and lives to Christ, that help without which they cannot attain unto purity of heart and life. Only those who are brought into very close contact with

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young men can begin to appreciate the urgent need of special effort in this direction by a special agency such as our association has wisely created." Two years later he said: "This special work of the White Cross, designed to promote personal purity among young men, which our association was the first to undertake in this country, has made rapid progress in kindred associations. Our own branch numbers 1,888 members."

It should be added here that many Young Men's Christian Associations later withdrew from this form of work, because they felt averse to trusting in what was called a pledge. It was generally held that the work of the association was to accomplish the fundamental service of leading young men to Jesus Christ, and presenting purity of life as part of the life of loyal service to Him.

In the meantime, Dwight L. Moody, who had been secretary of the Chicago Young Men's Christian Association, and who had built the first association building in that city, had entered upon his great life work as an evangelist. He had gone to the British Isles and conducted his famous meetings in the year 1875.

Mr. William E. Dodge, Jr., was again president of the New York association. While in London he attended the Moody meetings, and became so deeply impressed with the practical results growing out of them, that under date of May thirty-first he wrote to Morris K. Jesup, who was associated with him on the board of directors of the association, suggesting the calling of a meeting of the New York clergymen of

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the various denominations to consider the question of inviting Moody and Sankey to hold a series of evangelistic meetings in New York. Writing of this later, McBurney says: "On June twenty-first, in answer to this call, two hundred men, mostly clergymen, met and unanimously invited the evangelists. The invitation was accepted, and the evangelists labored in our city from February seventh to April nineteenth, 1876. The large hall of the Hippodrome, seating six thousand people, was usually filled fifteen minutes after the doors were opened, and generally an overflow meeting was held in the smaller hall, seating four thousand persons. The vast audiences and the appeals from the platform, which figured most prominently in the press reports, were simply the introduction to the work. One hour and a quarter was usually occupied in preaching each day, while five and one-half hours were employed by Mr. Moody and Mr. Sankey, and the Christian men and women assisting them in direct personal labor with individuals in the inquiry room. At these services hundreds of men rarely seen in places of worship crowded the galleries."

McBurney and the workers of the Young Men's Christian Association took a most active part in this revival. A large proportion of the working force of the association labored assiduously in the inquiry rooms, in the choir, and as ushers. Not only in its origin, but in the conduct of the campaign, the association was a most important factor. It threw its forces without reserve into the movement.

With regard to this revival, McBurney said:

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“Hope was inspired in those who had lost courage; drunkards were reclaimed; thieves and gamblers were reformed; men living in degrading sins forsook evil ways, and women fallen and outcast were returned to their families and friends. A stronger faith in God and in his power and willingness to rescue the most hopeless was awakened. A manifest revival of religious thought and purpose visited the community, and an impulse was given to every good work.

“Towards the close of the services a convention was held which was attended by over two thousand clergymen. Many of these upon returning home engaged in work with redoubled earnestness, and the influence of the awakening widely extended beyond the city.”

The revival not only brought a great blessing to the membership of the association, but resulted in the accomplishing of an end for which McBurney had hoped for some years. The bonded indebtedness of \$150,000 left on the Twenty-third Street building was a serious drawback to the work. McBurney had frequently called attention to it, and urged that it be removed. During the close of the Moody meetings a desire was expressed for the erection of a large hall below Fourteenth Street, where union evangelistic services could be held every evening. A meeting of gentlemen, who had been identified with the Hippodrome services, was called to consider this subject, among them President Dodge of the association, several members of the board, and Mr. Moody, all of whom favored the proposition. McBurney re-

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ports of this gathering: "Some of the older gentlemen not connected with our work took decided ground in urging, first, the payment of the mortgage debt on the association building, and then the enlargement of the work of the Bowery branch by the erection of a suitable edifice, containing a hall of moderate size in which gospel meetings could be held. This plan was adopted, and Mr. Moody and the members of the board of directors solicited contributions. We are grateful to report that subscriptions amounting to \$200,000 were secured, \$150,000 to be devoted to the payment of the mortgage debt, and \$50,000 for the Bowery branch." This \$50,000 was expended on the work of the Young Men's Christian Institute, located on the Bowery, and carried on for young working-men. This great revival freed the association from debt and inspired the members with new zeal for service.

One of the marked features of the New York association's development during this entire period was the growth of branches in various directions, and by means of these the adaptation of the association to different classes of young men. Two kinds of branches were established: the one for the general class of young men engaged in business and other callings, in which the work was similar to that at the Twenty-third Street building; the second for railroad men, who formed a considerable element in the population of New York.

Before entering the Twenty-third Street building, on April second, 1866, there was started the Western Branch, which was succeeded by the Bowery Branch, in May, 1872.

In February, 1868, a branch was established in Harlem; in 1872 a branch was opened on the East side on East Eighty-sixth Street; in 1881 a German branch was organized, and three years later a building secured; in 1885 the Young Men's Institute was opened on the Bowery for the class of young working-men who could not be attracted by the general rescue work of the old Bowery Branch. Admission to the building was confined to members and their guests. This same year, the branch at East Eighty-sixth Street secured a property. In 1885, at the death of William H. Vanderbilt, the association received a legacy of \$100,000, which was to be devoted as the board should see fit for the extension of association work in New York City. This was applied later towards the purchase of a lot for the West Side Branch.

The most striking branch development during this period was the establishment of work among railroad men. This was attended with considerable difficulty, and at first grew slowly. The influence came from Cleveland, Ohio, where the first railroad association had been established in 1872. In the fall of 1875, through the agency of the International committee, Mr. Lang Sheaf and Mr. Henry Stager, of Cleveland, came to New York, and with the indispensable cooperation of Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt, succeeded on the twentieth of November in establishing a branch in rooms granted by the railroad company. The report for the following January says: "Successful effort among this class of men is surrounded with greater difficulties in

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New York than in any other prominent railway center."

It is interesting to note that Cornelius Vanderbilt's name is for the first time connected with the association as chairman of the auditing committee in 1875. In that year he became a member of the board of directors, and soon chairman of the finance committee, and chairman of the committee on railroad work, and later vice-president of the association. In 1883 George A. Warburton became secretary of the railroad branches of the city, and this department immediately began a rapid development. Much of its success was due to Cornelius Vanderbilt. He took an active and personal interest in the affairs of the association, and it is largely through his indorsement of this work that it became generally accepted by the railroad systems of the continent.

A personal friendship sprang up between Mr. Vanderbilt and McBurney. Mr. Vanderbilt survived McBurney but a few months, and in his published will Robert R. McBurney was bequeathed a legacy of \$10,000.

In 1886 Mr. Vanderbilt announced his purpose to erect, at his own expense, on land belonging to the Vanderbilt railroad interests at the corner of Madison Avenue and Forty-fifth Street, a building for the use of the railroad branch. At the time of its completion, it was the finest building devoted to this purpose in existence. The total cost of the structure, as afterwards enlarged, was \$225,000.

Speaking of the railroad work at this time, McBurney called attention to the fact that there



were 800,000 men employed upon the 80,000 miles of American railways; that these men were largely away from home, often engaged upon the Sabbath, and were away from the ordinary influences of the church; that they formed an important element in modern society, and needed a special agency to lead them into the Christian life.

McBurney was a careful student of the constitution of the association and the method of administration of its branches. In a paper entitled "The Branch and the Association—Their Relations," he says: "The general secretary of the association should have general care of the work of the association, whether carried on at the central rooms or at the branches, and for these reasons I believe the secretary of the branch should occupy to him the relation of assistant secretary. . . . But while he is general secretary of the association, he must not assume the position of master of the branch. His relations should be so unselfish and loving that the secretary of the branch will accept his suggestions and criticisms. . . . He should be careful not to interfere with the details of the work of the secretary of the branch, and what is of equal importance, he should be careful not to take to himself the credit of the work of the branch. . . . The aim of the general secretary should be to keep himself out of sight, and to commend in every judicious way the branch secretary and his work. On the other hand, the secretary of the branch should not be on the lookout to find wherein the general secretary has slighted him or his work. Be

assured if the spirit of strife or envy enters into the heart of either secretary, the spirit of the Lord will take his departure."

When the Twenty-third Street building was erected, McBurney was very anxious to occupy the large room, with a smaller room opening from it, in the tower of the building. This had been intended, as the light came in from all directions, for an artists' studio. The board of directors were determined that he should not live in the same building in which he worked. One who knew the circumstances well, later said: "The directors came to the decision when the building was completed that McBurney could not have a room in it at any price, not for love or money; that he must, for the sake of his own health, live outside of the building. They said he would consume himself with work and must get out more." Two or three years went by. A number of workers in the association who were McBurney's special friends rented rooms on the floor under the tower room, and McBurney's desire for this room increased. In 1873 it became vacant. Mr. Dodge and Mr. Brainerd were away.

Speaking of this a friend said later: "At a meeting of the board of directors during the summer McBurney was allowed to take this room at a rental of \$100 a year." This tower room became McBurney's home. The larger room was his parlor and the smaller room his bedroom. He fitted it up according to his own tastes, and here received his friends, and carried on innumerable confidential conferences with association leaders on subjects of vital moment

to the work. This room was McBurney's study; here he gathered his library; here he prepared his lessons for his Bible classes, and here were the deepest scenes of his prayer life alone with God. Often in the still hours of the night from this tower he would gaze out over the sleeping city with its long streets and miles of buildings tenanted with thousands of aspiring, tempted, restless young men. For twenty-five years he occupied this tower room until it became associated with him in the thoughts of his fellow-secretaries over the whole country. It was a well-kept room, consistent with the strict personal neatness of the man, but it was of that easy comfortableness of aspect which allowed orderliness without stiffness. McBurney was somewhat of a collector of curios, and he much fancied antiques when in the form of bric-a-brac, furniture or pictures. Antiquarian shops had a peculiar fascination for him, and he was fond of collecting old prints. These tastes were shown in the furnishing and decoration of this room.

His fondness for fishing was seen in his library which had 256 volumes on sports and angling. It contained copies from eighty-one editions of Isaac Walton.

His fondness for hymns was also seen in a large collection on hymnology. He frequently quoted hymns aloud. One of his special favorites, which by his request was sung at his funeral, was:

“Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult  
Of our life's wild, restless sea,  
Day by day His sweet voice soundeth,  
Saying, 'Christian, follow me!'”

*In the Twenty-third Street Building*

“Jesus calls us from the worship  
Of the vain world’s golden store;  
From each idol that would keep us,  
Saying, ‘Christian, love Me more!’

“In our joys and in our sorrows,  
Days of toil and hours of ease,  
Still He calls, in cares and pleasures,  
‘That we love Him more than these!’

“Jesus calls us: by Thy mercies,  
Saviour, make us hear Thy call,  
Give our hearts to Thine obedience,  
Serve and love Thee best of all.”

This hymn breathed the aspiration of McBurney’s life.

On March thirty-first, 1887, on the anniversary of McBurney’s fiftieth birthday, as a recognition of his services and of personal regard, a reception was tendered him by his New York friends. He had been twenty-five years in the service of the New York Young Men’s Christian Association. When the question of a gift which would be most appreciated arose in the minds of his friends, it was decided that he be given a sum with which to purchase books for his library, and especially its Biblical department. Mr. William E. Dodge, in an appropriate address, presented him with a bag filled with gold eagles for this purpose.

At this reception Dr. Howard Crosby, who had known McBurney from the beginning, commenting upon his years of service, said: “I know of no pastor of any church in this city whose ministry has been so useful and extended as the ministry of McBurney.”

These years as secretary in the Twenty-third

## *Life of Robert R. McBurney*

Street building, and of the growing work throughout New York city, were years of real achievement. In the vigor of his manhood, McBurney was demonstrating to the world the value of the work to which he had given his life. But constant application to this work was taxing to his strength. While of robust physique, he was already a sufferer from rheumatism, and occasionally had attacks of gout which increased in frequency during the ten remaining years of his life. Towards the close of 1891, McBurney's health was so impaired that when his friend Elbert B. Monroe pressed upon him the acceptance of a gift of \$1,000 with a view to a trip to the Holy Land, he accepted it. Early in the following year with Mr. and Mrs. Richard C. Morse and Charles K. Ober, McBurney set out on a tour of southern Europe and Palestine. Two closer friends than McBurney and Mr. Morse, bound together by life-long service in the same cause, could hardly have entered upon a more enjoyable vacation. McBurney took immense interest in the journey and in everything he saw, an interest and a profit which was increased by his long attention to Bible study. Mr. Brainerd said of him: "He read carefully in respect to his various journeys in Europe and the Holy Land. He was fully equipped in this regard to make his travels useful to himself, and contributions to his general stock of available knowledge."

Just before sailing McBurney wrote a characteristic letter to his friend, George A. Hall, who was also absent from New York, on account of overwork.

## *In the Twenty-third Street Building*

February 3, 1892.

MY DEAR GEORGE:

An old cripple writes to an invalid, greeting: Since the early part of November I have been fighting rheumatic gout. The doctors say that it is due to having been run down physically. I am tied up now in bed though expecting to sail for Egypt and the Holy Land on Saturday. I am now suffering from a second relapse. I had much rather be with you than to go to Europe for you know I am not very fond of the water.

I expect, old chap, you are lonely down there. Dear George, I would say of you as Mr. Dodge said of me to-day to Mr. Orne, "Is there nobody that could keep Mr. McBurney quiet?" We both have so much steam aboard that we consider all men mortal but ourselves. We have got to face the fact that we are growing old, and that we have worked rather injudiciously, and that we must now to the end of our days suffer the consequences. But I have learned the lesson many years ago that no man is necessary to the Lord's work. When you and I are removed from service, they will find men, undoubtedly different from us, in some respects more useful and in other respects not so much so, still the work will go on. Being set aside is not pleasant to face. I have the impression that when the time comes for you to be set aside, you will bear it a thousandfold better than I. Perhaps a prolonged rest on your part and on my part will be the means of giving us years of service. Dear George, we are in a loving Father's hand. I sometimes fear that I do not think as much as I ought of the tender, loving care of my Father. I thank Him for it both night and morning but not with as much feeling as I ought, still He is so near, thank His name.

Yes, your recovery and mine must of necessity be slow, because the breaking down process has been going on for many years unconsciously to ourselves, and indeed, to our friends.

The anniversary of the association passed off delightfully. Six hundred persons were turned away and the side aisles of the hall were packed with people who stood during the two hours. The attraction was, of course, Mr. Depew. Mr. Rainsford also spoke, and spoke very

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sensibly. I read my report and Mr. Morse says I read it better than in any former year, and I think, on the whole, it presented our case as well as any former report.

I wish I could go to the state convention and the Secretary's Conference, but I feel somehow that I am losing hold of our state work. Mr. See, as you know, has succeeded Mr. McConaughy on the state committee, and the only city secretary on the committee is Mr. Warburton. I know that I should not have written you all this association matter. We must trust other men more. We cannot expect that others' interest will be quite as great as ours, because we were at the beginning of the association, and a father takes more interest and has more affection for his own child than he would have in any other person's child, though he may have a very strong affection for the child of another.

With a heart full of love, dear George, I am, as ever,

Yours,

(Signed) R. R. MCBURNEY.

This journey brought McBurney a complete rest. Shut away from the activities which had absorbed his thought, he was free to enjoy the scenes and recall the history of the places he visited. The record he has left of his impressions of his visit to Palestine is full of interest, and upon his return he gave several addresses before the branches of the New York City Association.

While passing north from Jerusalem, he wrote as follows:

"Sunday we passed pleasantly near Shiloh a quiet, restful day. Monday we tarried en route at the impressive ruin of Shiloh, where the ark remained so long. We took our lunch at Jacob's well, in the outskirts of the city of Sychar. The day was very beautiful. We read together that wonderful chapter of the fourth Gospel. The same fields—months now before the harvest—were before us, the same mounts Gerizim and Ebal rose above



## *In the Twenty-third Street Building*

us, and there came with sight and sense of the environment, perception and realization also of our dear Lord's contact with our earth and our human nature and then with ourselves spiritually. I *begin* to understand a little how perhaps into the gospel story of Him may be woven for me by these journeyings on His pathway a few new threads of varying hue which will make the picture more vivid to my eye. Perhaps it may help me to make it more vivid to others. I hope it may be so. But I write to-day as one feeling his way and at the very beginning of new impressions, the value of which it may not be wise now to scrutinize and estimate too closely."

## CHAPTER VII

### McBURNEY AS METROPOLITAN SECRETARY OF NEW YORK, 1887-1898

#### THE METROPOLITAN ORGANIZATION—WORK FOR STUDENTS—SOME INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS—THE WEST SIDE BUILDING—THE NEW YORK WORK IN 1898

The proposal of that radical change in the constitution of the New York association which involved the creation of what is known as its present metropolitan organization, originated with Mr. Elbert B. Monroe. Mr. Monroe had been a member of the association since 1853, one of the board of directors since 1871, and president during the years 1877-1882. After his resignation from the presidency in 1882, he continued upon the board of directors, and in December, 1886, again accepted the presidency. He was deeply impressed with the fact that as the branches of the association multiplied the board of directors was overtaxed by being made responsible both for the administration of the association work in its largest building, and by the supervising care of all the other branches and buildings in the city. He brought the subject to the attention of his associates and of McBurney, and proposed that the board of directors be released from the detailed management of the work in the Twenty-third Street building, and be responsible thereafter only for the general oversight and control of the asso-

ciation throughout the city. Speaking of this, McBurney said. "The board of directors has wisely kept the work of the Twenty-third Street building entirely under their own care, supervising every detail, and developing the work to an efficiency and usefulness which is felt not only in every one of our branches, but by the co-operating agencies of the state and international committees, and even in other lands. But as our branches have multiplied, and in connection with four of them, the care of buildings and property has been added to the care of the work itself, the labors of directors became so very arduous that some change seemed to be called for, by means of which on the one hand, the board of directors might be brought into equally close relations with every branch and building of the association, and on the other, that the details of the work in the Twenty-third Street building might be placed under the care of a committee of management similar to the committees charged with the details at the other branches."

The first official step was taken by the board in January, 1887, when Cornelius Vanderbilt, Cephas Brainerd, Moses Taylor Pyne, William S. Sloane, and Elbert B. Monroe were appointed a committee to consider the society's organization and recommend desirable changes.

This committee, after long and careful deliberation, recommended the present plan of the metropolitan organization, by which the work in the Twenty-third Street building was made a branch and placed on the same footing with other branches, and the board of directors,

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released from responsibility for this work, became separated to the control and supervision equally of all the branches of the one general organization.

The headquarters of the board became known as the general office, and were located in rented rooms on Twenty-third Street not far from the central building. A committee of management and a secretary were placed in charge of the Twenty-third Street building, and McBurney became general secretary for the entire multiplied work of the city, devoting himself to its supervision and extension. This left each branch to develop its own work in its own way within proper limits, and under continuous close supervision by the board of directors.

The date at which this step was carried into effect was June, 1887. Philadelphia and Chicago adopted the metropolitan plan of organization in 1888. The following table illustrates the branch development during this closing period of McBurney's life:

- 1887. Railroad branch opened in round-house,  
West Seventy-second Street.  
Railroad building, Madison Avenue,  
opened.
- 1888. Bowery building bought.  
Athletic grounds and boat-house leased.  
Harlem building completed.
- 1889. French branch opened.  
Student work organized as "The Student  
Movement."
- 1891. Mott Haven railroad rooms opened.  
Washington Heights branch opened.

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- 1892. Washington Heights building secured.
- 1893. Madison Avenue railroad building doubled in size.
- 1894. Lexington Avenue student building purchased.
- 1896. West Side building completed and opened.  
East Side building partially erected.

The most original branch development of this period was the organization of a work among the students of New York City. This appealed deeply to McBurney. In the colleges and professional schools of the metropolis there were some fifteen thousand young men, most of them away from home, with slender resources, striving with all their might to fit themselves for their life work. McBurney's heart yearned to help these young men, and no enterprise unless it was the West Side building appealed to him more strongly during the closing years of his life.

In a considerable number, students have been members of the New York association since 1863. A Medical Students' Union had been formed in 1867, which four years later was succeeded by a Student Bible class taught at the Twenty-third Street building. The development of the intercollegiate movement throughout the country had reached a number of the New York institutions. The visit of Henry Drummond in 1887, and the account of his work among students in Scotland increased the interest already awakened. In 1889 the employment of a student secretary was made practicable by McBurney's devoting part of his own salary for

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this purpose, and a branch, known as the Student Movement, was organized. A home for this department was secured in a dwelling-house at No. 136 Lexington Avenue, and in August, 1894, a four-story dwelling-house, No. 129 Lexington Avenue, was purchased for \$23,750. This is known as the Students' Club, and was opened as headquarters for this movement. Student associations were formed in the various colleges of the city, and these were combined into the New York Intercollegiate Movement.

The departmental growth of this period was marked by an extension of the physical work to outdoor athletics, by the organizing of the evening class work into a department, the development of a group of economic features for young men, and perhaps more significant than any of these, by the introduction upon a considerable scale of work for boys.

McBurney had through a period of years, in his annual report to the association and its friends, urged the importance of athletic grounds and a boat-house. The realization of this project came in March, 1888, through the purchase of the boat-house and athletic equipment of the New York Athletic Club, at One Hundred and Fiftieth Street, and the rental of its grounds and water front.

In the last decade of the century, the educational work grew to conspicuous proportions. McBurney set out to constitute this work into a distinct department. This may be said to have been accomplished by the employment at the Twenty-third Street branch of an educational director in 1895.

With that year also appeared the business institute, or day business college, which was carried on by the association in the rooms used in the evening for the educational classes.

In the autumn of the same year, the Harlem branch opened an evening school for young men in the mechanical trades.

McBurney sought continually to have the educational work of the association placed upon the same basis with the long-established educational institutions of the country, and he pleaded steadily for adequate endowment. In the report covering the year 1895 he said: "It may be well to note that not more than eight of all the colleges and universities of the United States have a larger number of students than attend our educational classes. Colleges and universities are endowed or supported by state appropriations, while the association has no endowment for its large educational work. Many of the young men receiving instruction in our educational classes have found it necessary to begin wage earning insufficiently equipped for their life work, and it would seem that no object of an educational character could be more worthy of endowment than the educational work of the New York association."

A number of economic features were gradually connected with the New York work. McBurney had always urged that the association should help to secure employment for young men, and this had long been a feature of the New York association work. About 1890 savings funds were instituted in several branches, and bank accounts opened to the credit of



depositors. The most important economic development, however, was a movement toward furnishing living quarters for young men in the association buildings. This was not undertaken until its usefulness had been demonstrated elsewhere. It is a movement which promises much for the future. McBurney became deeply interested in it, especially in relation to providing rooms for students.

In the ripened years of his experience, McBurney grasped none of the possibilities of the association more clearly and earnestly than he did the opportunity for work among boys. He saw that the association must get hold of young men before they reached the ages of seventeen and eighteen years, and while they are particularly susceptible to ennobling influences. He recognized the need of separate buildings for boys' work, and was instrumental in making the first provision to meet this need. The West Side building stands as an evidence of his interest both in the dormitory movement and the association work for boys.

The closing effort of McBurney's career as the secretary of the New York association was devoted to the erection of the double building for the West Side branch, between Eighth and Ninth avenues, extending through from Fifty-sixth to Fifty-seventh streets, with entrances upon both streets. This building is recognized as the monument of McBurney's matured experience and thought. It is practically two buildings, the one on Fifty-sixth Street being devoted on the lower floors to an association for boys, and on the upper floors to the library and dor-

mitories, the building on Fifty-seventh Street being devoted to an association for young men. In this building was embodied the sum of association development through the quarter century of swift and broad progress, whose beginning was marked by that other memorial of his thought and care, the association building on Twenty-third Street. What a span of association history, and what a wealth of development in work for young men! What a life of wonderful service lies between these two historic structures — the one the pioneer in the building movement, the other the highest consummation of the association's development during the life of its great leader.

The lots for this structure were purchased in 1894, at a cost of \$165,000. This sum was provided by the legacy already noted from the will of William H. Vanderbilt (with \$40,000 accumulated interest), and by Cornelius Vanderbilt, who added sufficient to make the purchase. Work was immediately begun, and the building was finally opened near the close of 1896. But the development of this project had begun long before. In former reports McBurney had emphasized the importance of a building for the benefit of young men residing on the west side of the city, and back of this public appeal there was long-continued, earnest planning, and hard, faithful effort. The project was marked by an audacity which made even McBurney's close associates hesitate. The entire building was planned and erected before any association was organized to occupy it. There was no membership, no managing committee, no secretary or physical director, although the enterprise when

completed, including land, building, and furnishings involved an outlay of over \$555,000. But McBurney had long before planned for the development of the organization within the new building, and had definitely selected and trained not only a man to be its secretary but the committee of management who were to take it in charge. Both the chairman and the secretary of the young men's institute branch were transferred to officer the new association, and the committee of management was made up chiefly of men familiar with association work.

One thing that impressed McBurney as he studied this part of the New York field was the large student body near at hand. These men he declared should have living-rooms in the building, and the third and fourth floors on the Fifty-sixth Street side were accordingly adapted to this end.

It was decided to place the association library in this building, and to have it so arranged that young men in all the branches could make use of it or draw books as they wished. Accordingly, the fifth and sixth floors on the Fifty-sixth Street side were fitted up in the most approved style for a library.

The first and second floors on this side were given over to work for boys, a separate gymnasium complete and well equipped with baths was provided; pleasant social rooms with games and reading matter, rooms for Bible classes and religious meetings, quarters for manual training and Sloyd work were provided, and a secretary was placed in charge of this work. The conception of this department was that it was to be

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a work for boys by boys. It was the best equipped association building for boys at that time in existence.

In this, McBurney aided materially in awakening association leaders to a recognition of the importance of beginning their work when the boy begins to become a man—at the dawn of adolescence.

The building opening on Fifty-seventh Street was arranged for the general purposes of the West Side branch. In the basement were gymnasium lockers, bicycle storage-room, bowling alleys, and a swimming-pool. On the first floor were the central reception-room and office, reading-room, parlor, coat-room, and a small lecture-room; on the second floor, the board-room, class-rooms, and a hall having 666 seats. The third, fourth, and fifth floors were given to class-rooms, a camera club-room, and a restaurant provided for the convenience of the young men living in the dormitory, and other members of the association. The top floor was devoted to the gymnasium, furnishing one of the finest gymnasium floors (53 by 102 feet) to be found in New York City. A number of elevators furnished quick communication between the floors, and there was a special elevator running between the gymnasium and the dressing-room in the basement.

This building in its conception, its original features, its varied departments, its splendid adaptation to its purposes, and in its perfection, is a complete expression of McBurney. Into it he builded the closing years of his life, and it was a fitting tribute to his memory that the debt

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of \$77,000 remaining upon it should have been raised as a memorial to him, and a bronze bas-relief of himself placed as the gift of loving friends upon its walls.

The field and work of the Young Men's Christian Association of New York City in 1898 as compared with 1862 presents a striking contrast. The city had grown marvellously in wealth and population, until with its environs it was the center of three and one-half millions of persons. The Young Men's Christian Association had grown from a halting experiment, burdened with debt, with a few faithful members, and a secretary who also acted as janitor, occupying humble rooms in a second story, to one of the most vigorous philanthropic and religious agencies of the great metropolis. In the first year of McBurney's official connection with the society, it was securing with great difficulty \$2,800 per year which was expended in carrying on work at one point in the city. In 1898 the association reported a net annual budget of \$175,000, expended in conducting fifteen different branches. This involved the raising annually through contributions of \$60,000. When McBurney entered the rooms at the Bible house, the association was six months behind in its rent; when his career closed, the real estate and endowments of the New York association were valued at \$2,000,000. One of the great features of McBurney's work had been the development of a large contributing constituency.

Mr. Dodge said of McBurney: "When he began his work in the New York association it was very small, and hardly known or understood

in the town. It was a new work then. It had scarcely the confidence even of the churches. It was wonderful how he touched and influenced young men; and yet as I look back upon it, it was more wonderful how he won the confidence and esteem of the wealthy men of the city, of clergymen of all denominations and all faiths, and of good men who loved the city and the country."

In 1898 work was being carried on at the old building on Twenty-third Street, the new building of the West Side branch, the Harlem branch on One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, the Washington Heights branch on One Hundred and Fifty-fifth Street, the East Side branch on Eighty-sixth Street, the Students' branch on Lexington Avenue, the Young Men's institute on the Bowery near Prince Street, the Bowery branch at the corner of Broome Street, the German branch on Second Avenue, the French branch on West Twenty-first Street, and the Railroad branches on Madison Avenue, at Melrose Junction on West Seventy-second Street, at Weehawken, and at New Durham. At nine of these points the association owned buildings, and practically owned the Madison Avenue Railroad branch, where the building was held by special trustees for association purposes.

Even more remarkable than the acquiring of this property was a development as yet but little discussed—the growth of the employed force of the association. McBurney had rare knowledge of men. He not only associated himself in the boards of directors with leaders in the business and religious life of New York, but he was successful in selecting able assistants for



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the detailed work of the great enterprise with which he was charged. In looking up men he was very careful. In one of his letters of inquiry about a young man in college, he asked the following questions: "Has he graduated? Is he a gentleman? Is he social? I understand that he is very successful in personal work. How is he in Bible study? Has he administrative ability? Is he good-looking? How tall is he? Get everything you can about him, and tell me if he is the man for us."

McBurney was always prompt and vigorous in his defense of the associates employed with him in the New York work. At one time when the physical directors of the city had been criticised, at the close of a vigorous letter in their behalf, he said: "I write thus in defense of as noble a band of men as I have the pleasure of being acquainted with. I refer to the thoroughly trained and experienced physical directors in the branches of the Young Men's Christian association of the city of New York."

The employed force of the Young Men's Christian association had increased in thirty-six years from one man to 149 men, giving their entire time to the work of the association. This was exclusive of sixty teachers who worked evenings in the educational department. There was also a well-organized army of 1,092 active members serving on committees in the various association branches. Eight of the branch associations of New York had gymnasiums in charge of competent instructors, and classes and physical examinations were conducted for 3,024 association members. There were three swimming-pools



in different buildings, and in connection with all the gymnasiums were to be found bowling alleys along with tub and shower baths. Athletic grounds were provided for the use of the members. Holiday excursions and vacation camps were features of association life. A boat-house was moored at Barretto Point in the East River, with a full supply of boats. Work for boys was carried on at five of the branches, with libraries, literary societies, Bible classes, gymnasia, and other features.

Educational advantages were enjoyed by nearly two thousand young men enrolled in seventy-three classes. In these thirty-five different branches of study were taught. In the association libraries there were 70,303 volumes, and in the reading-rooms 1,525 newspapers and magazines were on file.

The membership had grown in thirty-six years from 151, who paid an annual fee of \$2.00, to 8,328 who paid fees ranging from \$2.00 to \$15.00 annually. The average daily attendance of young men in the reading and social rooms was 5,670.

Most of the associations had literary and debating societies, between which an interesting rivalry existed. Socials, talks, and lectures, to the number of 866, were given in a single year.

Visitation of the sick was conducted with the same regularity as in the early days when the broader advantages were not enjoyed. In relief for destitute young men, through the Bowery branch, the amount of \$4,100 was directly expended; and at this branch 34,709 lodgings, 100,450 meals, and 1,043 garments were sup-

plied in a single year. Through the employment bureau, in 1898, situations were secured for 5,664 young men. Boarding-house registers were kept at the different branches, and in several, restaurants were operated. In addition to the Bowery branch, which had lodgings for 100, accommodations for a fair remuneration were available for 204 young men.

Bible classes and other religious gatherings for the year numbered 2,874, an average of nearly eight per day, and 4,171 young men are reported as having personally sought religious counsel in one year.

One can hardly conceive the ceaseless, daily activity of this great organization which had grown up within the term of one general secretary, and which was so largely the expression of the heart-life of his determined spirit.

## CHAPTER VIII

### McBURNNEY'S VIEWS ON ASSOCIATION WORK

In noting what were McBurney's ideals of the Young Men's Christian Association and its work, perhaps the most complete conception may be gained from the narrative already given of his work in New York City. As previously said, he expressed himself institutionally. In the course of the development of the association, since its founding, in 1844, there have been two distinct types of work; the one a general evangelistic work usually for various classes in the community, and the other a specialized, organized work for the culture of Christian manhood.

McBurney was the exponent of this latter type of work, and led it to complete triumph. It should be noted that he did not originate many of the ideas which he held regarding the association, but his common sense and acumen led him to seize upon those principles and methods which were best suited to win young men. In making an analysis of his views, the first thing to be marked is his idea of the association's object. That object, to his view, was the young man and only the young man. He antagonized the conception that the Young Men's Christian Association should engage in Christian effort on behalf of society at large. This was the guiding principle of his choice of methods and all the

subsidiary features of the work. He grasped intuitively the methods which would reach the specific class he sought. He recognized that the association was seeking the young men, not the young men the association. Its aim was not to admonish but to attract and help. He wanted to give young men in the association what they might seek elsewhere under far different influences. It was his habit to contrast outlays made by theaters and saloons with outlays for attractions and means of recreation made by the associations. As he grew older in the work, his recognition of the power of social attractions seemed to grow. At the Connecticut State convention in 1867, he said: "It is our business to exclude amusements from the rooms of the association; Christ did not use the amusement plan."

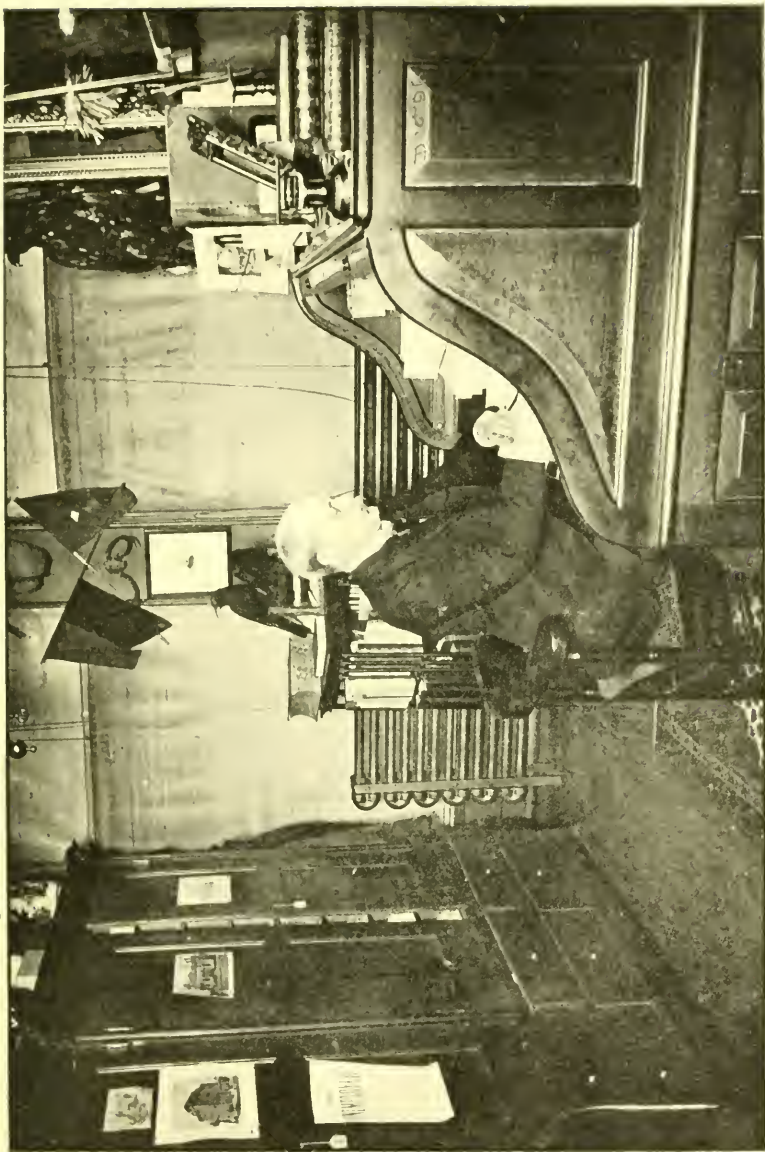
But in 1890 he wrote: "It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the social element as a factor in winning and holding young men in right paths. Much has been done by the association in this direction, but much more should be done. If the young stranger is to be helped from falling into bad social surroundings by the association, its rooms must become a center of magnetic social power. While the association cannot be a substitute for the home, it may be so pervaded by the spirit which makes home the happiest spot on earth that the young stranger will find in it very much that he is deprived of elsewhere in his city life. While young men loathe patronage, they are more open than any other class to hearty, manly, cordial courtesy."

In 1885 McBurney wrote this rather entertaining survey of the institution: "A person unfamiliar with the association might ask, in passing this building, 'For what object has it been erected?' Some of ample means have the impression that it is a place to which they can send destitute men, whom they would like to help, provided it cost them nothing. Others consider it an organization of young men without much physical or intellectual force, and easily imposed upon by any shrewd scoundrel who comes along. The hobby-rider thinks it is exactly the kind of society that will give him an opportunity to ride his hobby before the public. The unknown singer or lecturer desiring to be heard by a New York audience expects that, on the plea of a benefit for some benevolent object, the hall will be granted free of expense. These four classes generally go away disappointed. Another class of persons think we hold here a perpetual prayer-meeting. Others think that nothing else should be done under this roof but to hold religious services. Some think we are a bureau of information on every subject. One considers that the association is only a library, another that it is exclusively a gymnasium, another calls it an evening college or a club, or an employment agency. Others think it a place of social enjoyment and good-fellowship. The fact is, it is a little of all these. Even the goodyish young man may be found here, just as he is found in nearly every social gathering and in every line of business. But also, among the young men composing the working force of the association, will be found in much greater number those who

are hard in muscle, firm in will, kind in heart, cheerful in spirit, quick in wit, and earnest in purpose. The association was inaugurated by a body of young men touched by the spirit of Jesus Christ, and awakened to a sense of responsibility for the welfare of their fellows. It has sought to illustrate this object with an increasing effectiveness year by year. Its mission has been chiefly to young men of ability and intelligence rather above the average, and it has done a work mainly of prevention, often of rescue. Many thousand places stand open day and evening, inviting young men to the ruin of their bodies and souls. The association seeks to offer to such tempted young men attractive but wholesome places of resort."

McBurney had ever in mind the immensity of the task before the association compared with what it was able to accomplish, and he directly and without hesitancy expressed the conviction that the growth of the organization was and would be proportionate chiefly to the amount of the means placed at its disposal. In 1894 he said: "It may seem to some who read this report that the association is doing a large work. We admit it, but there are in New York City, according to the last census, 368,785 men between the ages of eighteen and forty-four—a larger population in men between those ages than the entire population of any one of eleven states which might be mentioned. We have but touched the edge of the work which the Young Men's Christian Association should be putting forth in this city in behalf of young men who are surrounded on every side by temptations in





MCBURNIE AT HIS DESK.





some respects more attractive and more debasing than our fathers knew anything about. The only thing that hinders us in making larger advance is the question of sufficient funds to do so. Many persons are willing to give money once, but in order to carry on a work that calls for increased expenditure year by year, steady contributions are necessary."

No one appreciated more keenly than McBurney the annual burden of raising funds, particularly when the yearly expenditure had passed the \$100,000 mark. Every recurrent cycle of business depression became a time of crisis for the association. He planned wisely for the future. He saw no practicable means of escape except by endowment, and he emphasized this in message after message annually before the association public. The Twenty-third Street building was so erected that the ground floor could be rented for stores, and thus an income secured. A large revenue was received in the West Side building from the rental of dormitories. He believed that a membership fee should be charged the young men using the privileges of the association, but was confident that the association would destroy its usefulness if this fee were increased above a certain point. He said on one occasion: "The association seeks to help the self-helping class of young men who, during the early years of their business life, receive small salaries, and pass through privations unknown to those who live in comfortable homes with happy surroundings. If the dues were increased so that the association would be self-supporting, it would become a

club, and those who most need its sympathy and help would be shut out, and the advantages confined to young men of ample means who need them least. If the association is to carry forward its work without serious financial difficulties, endowments for departments should be provided by the generous and public-spirited of this community."

In his conception of association constitution and government McBurney was a man of statesmanlike sagacity. He realized thoroughly that the changing membership of the society could not be entrusted with the control of the valuable properties which were being year by year accumulated. As he grew in knowledge of affairs, he came to recognize the importance for efficiency in administration of a centralized management. Under the leadership of McBurney and that of the business men associated with him, from the time of the trusteeship proposed in 1866 to the perfection of the metropolitan organization in 1887, this centralization developed more and more fixedly. By the metropolitan plan, the members elected a portion of the general board of directors each year. This board of directors chooses its own president, and this president appoints the managing committees of the various branches. The changing membership of the association has little more control of its affairs than has the changing student body the control of a great university.

Such a system suited McBurney's idea of an efficient scheme of government, but no leader in the association was more earnest than he in representing the work of the association as the

## McBurney's Views on Association Work

duty of the membership. He believed the association was a lay movement to be carried on by volunteer workers. He counted success in the management of the association to be the extent to which the membership was made truly and responsibly active in the work of the organization. He considered it the chief business of the secretary to place the responsibilities of the active work upon the members, and to develop others in Christian work.

In 1888 McBurney wrote a list of what he regarded the settled principles in association work, as follows:

1. That the work shall be for young men only.
2. That the welfare of the whole man—body, soul, and spirit—should be promoted by the energetic development of the physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual departments of our work.
3. That points of doctrine controverted by evangelical Christians are to be avoided, and the simplicity of the Gospel adhered to, chief emphasis being laid on well and freshly devised methods of pressing the acceptance of the Gospel upon young men.
4. That the best active members are not only members of churches, but spiritually minded, Sabbath-observing young men, who are and live in close fellowship with the Saviour.
5. That the churches to which our members belong have a prior claim on their sympathy and labors.
6. That money for our work outside membership fees is best obtained by solicitation from those interested in direct work for young men.
7. That when questions of moral reform become political party questions, our association, *as such*, can have no connection with them.
8. That associations should not be formed in towns of five thousand inhabitants and over unless provision is also made for the employment of a general secretary.
9. That in any town or city, however large, only

## *Life of Robert R. McBurney*

one Young Men's Christian Association should exist, and the field should be covered by organizing branches or departments of the association.

All these principles may be thoroughly understood and zealously advocated, but we need to remember that there is such a thing as dead orthodoxy, even in association work and method. Our knowledge must be vitalized and sustained by the Holy Spirit, and we must, as workers, be living in close communion with our Lord, or our work for Him will be without fruit.

On questions of doctrine McBurney was intensely practical. He held strongly to the evangelical view, but he was tolerant towards the opinions of others. He also recognized the restraints regarding the expression of personal belief which the holding of a public position in a religious organization entailed. In writing to a young man in September, 1893, who was thinking of becoming a medical missionary, McBurney said: "You give me your creed. Creeds are curious things. A man makes a statement in a creed, and then you have to ask him what he means by it. There are half a dozen questions that I could ask you about the creed you express, but I do not think this would be profitable. The best thing for you and for me is to engage in earnest Christian work for the bodies and souls of men. We might discuss creeds till doomsday, and I do not think anybody would be helped by it. It is touching men's hearts and lives for Christ that is our business, since we both believe that we have been redeemed by his precious blood, and that to-day he is our advocate before the throne. I would advise you to stop thinking about creeds if you can—I know it is difficult—and come into

heart-touch with men—lost men, men who are astray, and when you come to make effort to lead such men into right living, you will be more and more impressed with the fact that only by God's spirit, and through a new spirit begotten in them by the Holy Ghost, are they to be really helped."

He was not afraid to trust men who had struggled over theological problems. In fact, he felt that it strengthened a man to have thought out these questions for himself. In writing to Mr. John Swift in Japan, in July, 1897, regarding a Japanese Christian of prominence, he said: "You can rely more upon a man who has passed through phases of doubt, provided he comes out clear, than a man who has passed through no such experience."

During the latter years of McBurney's life, the authority of the Bible, and especially the question of inspiration, were under vigorous discussion in the church. He followed this discussion with interest, and even in his last sickness read Dr. A. C. McGiffert's *History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age*. He always held firmly to the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, but was very careful to discriminate between advocating the doctrine of inspiration and advocating a particular method of inspiration. In writing to a worker in the Salvation Army, he stated his own position very clearly. He said: "I fully believe the declaration of our Lord when he said, 'I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.' We may lift up the Bible, we may lift up many things, but the more we lift up Jesus Christ to the gaze of men, the more assuredly

will men be drawn to him. You must not infer from this that I have any doubts in relation to the divine origin of the Bible. In my heart of hearts I believe that what we call the Holy Scriptures were written by men inspired of God, and if we overthrow the Scriptures we overthrow our knowledge of God's dealings with men in ancient times, and we overthrow the record of the life and work of Jesus Christ."

Regarding the position of the association on the question of inspiration, in April, of 1897, he wrote to a leading worker in the association as follows: "It seems to me that the position association men should take, so far as the associations are concerned, at least, is that we believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures; but as theories of inspiration are in debate by equally devoted orthodox men, it is very unwise for any of our leaders to antagonize verbal inspiration or any other theory of inspiration. If we do, we will assuredly get the association into hot water."

In 1894, in response to a request for advice from a general secretary regarding critical Bible study, he wrote as follows: "Let me say, in all frankness, that I think in the present condition of Biblical criticism, and the discussion which has been awakened in connection with it, any Young Men's Christian Association undertaking critical Bible study at this time would make a grave mistake. The mission of the association is to help men in their daily life. Critical study of the Scriptures will not help them in this connection; practical study will. Critical study must be left to other agencies."



One of the vexed questions in the association has been the publication of an international organ. It has been difficult to get adequate support for an association paper. McBurney was deeply interested in this undertaking, and was one of the directors of the Era Company. He regarded the Era as a great improvement upon the Watchman. In his conception of an association paper he differed from the prevalent policy and from most of his brethren. He believed that instead of being an exclusively association organ it ought to be a paper for young men. This he advocated with enthusiasm, but his opinion in this matter was not accepted by the associations generally, particularly because it involved such a large financial outlay to carry out such a program. In writing to the editor of the Young Men's Era in November, 1892, he said: "I am very glad that you are seeking more and more to adapt the Era to the tastes of all classes of young men. Formerly it was attractive only to men who were actually engaged in our work. Now, it seems to me, there is something in it for every young man, and I am of the opinion that the more this is emphasized the better. My very great regret is that the company has not sufficient money to pay for articles by leading writers on topics of practical interest to young men. The Era occupies a unique field. In my opinion, if enough money were put into it, it would become the popular young men's paper—wholesome, spiritual, but thoroughly manly and aggressive. The young men of the land need just such a paper. . . . If I were a wealthy man, I think I would be so

selfish as to purchase all the unsold stock and put other money into it besides."

McBurney, however, recognized the difficulty of handling this enterprise, and in 1896, when it was proposed to bring the paper to New York and place Mr. George Warburton in charge of it as editor, he strongly opposed it. When Mr. Ober became editor of the paper, and its name was changed to Association Men, McBurney still advocated the same view that it should be made a general young men's paper. In December of 1896, he wrote to Mr. Ober: "Everybody that I have come in contact with who has seen the paper says it is a decided improvement on anything that has gone before, from the Watchman down. . . . I do not believe that 'Men' ought to be exclusively an association paper, for then it would only appeal to the committee-men and the men who are actively connected with the work. The views expressed in favor of making it exclusively a Young Men's Christian Association paper, if adopted, would be ruinous. There is room for a young men's paper; indeed, there is not another young men's paper published in this country, and the more it is made a young men's paper, the more in my opinion will it be successful, the Philadelphia Conference to the contrary notwithstanding."

McBurney also believed that an association paper should avoid controversy, and in no sense be a party organ.

In politics, McBurney was a constant and usually an enthusiastic Republican. He was deeply interested in civil service reform, and took some part in promoting it, being a member

of the Civil Service Reform Association. In 1894, in writing to a friend, he said: "You are quite correct in saying that I am in cordial sympathy with the Civil Service Reform Association. In the political life of our country I deem it to be the most important question before us; indeed, I consider it vital to the purity and perpetuation of our institutions." In the recent campaign, he had no sympathy with Mr. Bryan or his views. In writing to a friend in the West, in January, 1897, he said: "Somebody told me you were a Bryan man. I do not know who it was, but I am glad that you set yourself right on that subject, and I am particularly glad that the country has set itself right. Business has not improved very much, but I think things would have been much worse if Mr. Bryan had been elected. What do you mean by saying that Bryan represents the cause of a downtrodden, long-suffering people? We are a suffering people, I admit, but as to being downtrodden, I do not understand that statement. What profit would there be in doing anything else than patiently bearing the times through which we are passing? It is very, very difficult to understand all the causes which have brought about the present condition of things, but we are a free people, and I really do not know that anybody is downtrodden in this land. You speak of the Shylocks. I suppose there are some; but are not the people of the West to blame for incurring such financial obligations with their eyes open? Why do they place themselves in the hands of the Shylocks? Is not their difficulty largely due to their over-

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haste to get rich? . . . I do not consider such people downtrodden at all. I would say that they were unwise.

“As to the price of farm produce, I do not see how that could be altered. We cannot force up the price of wheat; if there is over-cultivation, of course, prices would be low. Notwithstanding all the drawbacks in our land, it is the Eden of the earth for men in all conditions of life.”

As a writer McBurney was an example of interesting development. This was shown in the successive annual reports which he prepared for twenty-six years, beginning with 1871. All these messages are filled with a devout spirit of thankfulness, and yet are pleasingly free from digressive and cumbersome platitudes. In speaking of them, Dr. Edward Prime, editor of the *New York Observer*, said, that they were unrivaled by those presented by any other religious society which came under his attention.

It was hard for McBurney to write. He went at it with much ado, and in the preparation of his reports made all within the official circles of the organization furnish contributions of material. He was editor of the *New York Association Notes*, and was an occasional contributor to the religious press. He was the author of several papers on association topics which were issued in pamphlet form. He also wrote an important historical sketch of the Young Men's Christian Association, which went through several editions. His articles dealing with the importance of young men's prayer-meetings and Bible study in the association are among his best contributions.

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McBurney prepared a Bible study course on the "Conversations of Jesus" which has been long and widely used. This was selected from a series of lessons which he gave before his classes at the Twenty-third Street building. It consisted of topics with references, and was adapted for evangelistic Bible teaching.

During his forty years of residence in New York, McBurney was an active member of St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church. He served on its board of trustees and its board of stewards. This was far from being his only work outside the association. His advice and counsel was sought by leaders in philanthropy, by Protestant ministers, by Catholic priests, and Jewish rabbis. From 1867 he was a leading and active member of the executive committee of the Evangelical Alliance for America. He was one of the founders, and for ten years a director of the New York Christian Home for Intemperate Men. Other managing boards of which he was a member at varying times were those of the American Tract Society, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Federation of Churches and Christian Workers, the Clerical Mutual Association, the New York Deaconess' Home and Training School of the Methodist Church, and the Manhattan Working Girls' Club. The Charity Organization Society and the New York Sunday School Association acknowledged obligations to him for special services. In his later years he was a valued member of the New York grand jury.

McBurney never married. His closest friends attributed his course in this respect to a Pauline

devotion to his work. His associates were impressed with the idea that this singleness of life prompted him to throw himself with more consuming energy into the service of young men, and made him more affectionately attached as with true fatherly regard for those who came under his influence. He seldom accepted invitations to social affairs outside the association, and declined membership in one of the leading New York social clubs lest it should divert his efforts. He was fully alive to the attractiveness of such pleasure, but he made all his decisions in the light of full surrender to the one end of his life. He was socially agreeable, a charming companion, sprightly in talk, cheerful in disposition, quick to appreciate humor, always attractive to young men. He seldom engaged in story-telling. He never used slang. He was scrupulous, even fastidious. McBurney indulged himself moderately in smoking tobacco, but he was careful not to smoke in the presence of young men who might be influenced thereby. He associated with many who thought it an improper habit for a Christian worker, but he always maintained that this was a matter which each man had a right to settle for himself. For general public amusements he had little taste and less time.

His particular recreation was fishing. He was an ardent lover of the woods, and he belonged to a group of prominent gentlemen, including several clergymen, who at times together enjoyed camping and its varied pleasures. The Catskills, the Adirondacks, and the Pennsylvania hills were the goals of several



brief pilgrimages for rest which McBurney allowed himself. On one of these occasions he nearly lost his life. While fishing in a boat, it was upset, and as he could not swim he came very near drowning, but was saved by Oliver C. Morse coming to his rescue. He was one of a committee of fishermen who were in the habit of arranging a trout dinner in the early winter, at which, after a bountiful banquet, the chief toasts were fish stories and other adventures.

McBurney's career as general secretary of the New York City Young Men's Christian Association passed through a series of interesting evolutions. His first service of two and one-half years, from the summer of 1862 to the winter of 1864, was an experimental period which did much to develop him as a Christian worker. The five years devoted to securing the Twenty-third Street building helped to make him a leader among men. The seventeen years, from 1870 to 1887, in which he presided as secretary of the Twenty-third Street building, and supervised the gradually growing work throughout the city, were years of ceaseless devotion and continued growth. They were marked by contact with intricate religious problems, and a close study of methods of work and the needs of young men. These years gave McBurney a fulness of wisdom which made him the valued counselor of his associates and of leaders in various lines of religious work. The closing period of the New York secretaryship, during which he was metropolitan secretary, were years of ripe experience and large influence. During these years his wide ac-



quaintance with Christian givers in New York, and the leaders of religious thought, were of great value to the association. He never lost his openness of mind or his enthusiasm for new projects. He grew symmetrically until the close, and was active in the advanced movements of the association, keenly alive to their bearing upon the whole problem of extending Christ's kingdom among young men.

McBurney early became interested in the literature of religious work among young men. He collected publications regarding religious movements among young people prior to the organization of the association. He possessed Woodward's volume on the religious societies in England during the reign of Charles the Second, and William, and Mary. He owned Cotton Mather's *Essays to do Good*, with an account of the early young men's societies in New England during the latter part of the seventeenth and the early part of the eighteenth centuries. Among his books was a life of David Nasmith, with an account of the young men's societies founded by him.

During these years of his New York service, he wrought out and exemplified the office and work of the general secretary. He showed the possibilities and the greatness of this service.

If his life had only been devoted to work for young men in the metropolis, it would have been a great career. He had helpfully touched the lives of thousands of young men, and had built in a great city a great institution which promises to be a permanent blessing to mankind.

## PART II

### CHAPTER I

#### THE LOCATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE IN NEW YORK CITY, 1865 TO 1867

We have studied McBurney as the general secretary of the Young Men's Christian Associations of New York City. We pass now to consider him in his larger relations to the movement in his own state, in America, in Europe, and throughout the world. His entrance upon the broader stage began on his return to the secretaryship in 1865, and continued until his death. He appeared at the strategic moment. The war was over, an experimental period of some fourteen years had gone by, and the American associations were ready for leadership into their distinctive work and mission. The movement at large was unformed, without experience or prestige, and without resources. It was natural that a movement which owed its existence to the rise of the city should look for leadership to the largest city of the continent. In the group of men who gave this direction McBurney was among the foremost.

Before the war, New York had refused to lead in the general work because of its fear of

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distractions over the slavery question, and because it was not yet clear what was to be the nature and power of the central organization. The return of peace banished forever the dividing issue, and with the adoption of a central authority, with emphasis upon its advisory function, all fear of compulsion from it vanished. The New York City Association was ready to enter heartily into a national organization.

McBurney's devotion to the cause as a whole, his seniority in the secretarial field, his close relations with a leading group of association laymen, the location at an early date of the international office near his own in the Twenty-third Street building in New York City, his intimate personal friendship with the chairman and the general secretary of the international committee, and above all, his peculiar force of natural leadership, made him a dominant figure in the general association field. The three conspicuous leaders in New York of the international work were Cephas Brainerd, chairman of the international committee; Richard C. Morse, its general secretary, and Robert R. McBurney. To this triumvirate of personal friends is largely due the present international work. It is difficult to dissociate the service of any one of these from the other two. Each influenced the others, and no one of the three acted alone. Writing, in 1882, after Mr. Brainerd had been twenty-five years chairman of the international committee, McBurney said: "In the beginning, and when it was unpopular, he grasped the basal idea of the association—work



CEPHAS BRAINERD.



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by young men for young men—and he has clung to it tenaciously throughout. Every report of the international committee to the conventions since his chairmanship has been written by him. Until 1872 the entire correspondence was conducted by him, and since that time it has been under his careful supervision. The secretaries of the committee have prosecuted their work under his direction. This remarkable unsalaried service for so many years by one thoroughly qualified leader has been of invaluable benefit to the work for Christ among young men in this and other lands. Mr. Brainerd has lived to see his correct conception and understanding of the associations, unpopular at first, gain at last in general approval and ascendancy.”

McBurney's first service to the general work was to make the international convention a real agency for furthering the specific work of the Young Men's Christian Association. This he did by welcoming the location of the committee in New York, and by systematizing and directing the conduct of the conventions. McBurney went to conventions to direct them. He did direct them. He kept away from the platform, usually allowed others to do the talking, was not much in public view, but behind the scenes he was active, vigilant, and in his element; indeed, McBurney exulted in a convention—not in the mass meetings, the speaking, or in attendance on sessions, although he was faithful in that, but in the work of accomplishing results—the political manipulation and leadership of forces. This thrilled him and brought forth

his utmost energy. Here he displayed his leadership and comprehensive grasp of association affairs. It was in conventions, and sometimes in committee meetings, that McBurney displayed his Irish eloquence. Not a ready platform-speaker, he would make the most telling presentation when once stirred. At the vital moment in a convention, he would speak from the floor with great energy, sometimes stamping his feet and clenching his hands, and with such enthusiasm that he swept down all opposition. He belonged to the type of orators described by John Morley\* when speaking of Cromwell, "as impressive by their laboring sincerity, by the weight of their topics, and by that which is the true force of all oratory worth talking about, the momentum of the orator's history, personality, and purpose."

He was also an aggressive factor in committee meetings. While always considerate of others' opinions, and willing to yield in what he regarded non-essentials, he was tenacious of what he regarded the right view. Indeed, one of his friends said of him, if a committee did not do as McBurney believed it ought, "it very soon became a matter of conscience with him whether he would remain upon the committee." However, another of his friends said of him: "He could be very strenuous, but when he came down to the bottom he was always willing to recognize that other people had the right to be strenuous, and that wisdom was not wholly with himself." And with all this he was not dictatorial.

\* Oliver Cromwell, p. 374.



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His first connection with the international work was at the Philadelphia convention in June, 1865. McBurney was then in his twenty-ninth year. With the six others from New York he found himself at Philadelphia assembled with over two hundred delegates from forty-seven different associations. As McBurney found the board of management of the New York association a training school for preparation for local work, so he found these conventions, representing different sections of the continent, attended by different types of men with varying ideas of association work, an institution fitting him for national leadership. He learned rapidly in this school. He perceived at once at the Philadelphia convention that, with possibly the exception of Boston, the association of which he was the executive officer was far in advance of the others represented. He also perceived that the movement at large had no clear conception of the distinctive mission of the association to young men, and he threw himself with all his energy into the advocacy of this cause.

Shortly after the convention had been called to order by Hon. Joseph A. Pond of Boston, the minutes stated that "Mr. R. R. McBurney of New York moved that a committee of one from each state, district, and province represented be appointed to report a list of officers for permanent organization. The president appointed McBurney as the chairman of this nominating committee. Speaking of this action, McBurney said: "As soon as the committee went into session it was apparent that the Philadelphia

members were determined to elect a military officer as president. I took ground in favor of New York, as New York had never had the presidency. The committee was some time in reaching a conclusion, but finally nominated Mr. Cephas Brainerd, whose name I had submitted." McBurney strongly favored the appointment of the nominating committee of one from each state by the retiring president, as he believed it promoted political methods to have the members of this committee selected by the different states, and it is probable that he felt the importance of keeping as far as possible the control of this committee in the hands of the international committee. It was in connection with the overthrow of this system that McBurney met one of the severest defeats of his life.

No suitable arrangements had been made for the convention by the committee of the preceding year. As a new committee was appointed each year, there was usually little planning in advance. No topics had been announced for discussion, no one had been assigned to read papers. The convention necessarily took the shape of a religious mass meeting. It seemed to have no clearly defined purpose. Men were present with various projects which they sought to get the convention to indorse. One man wanted the convention to form an American Protestant association to oppose Roman Catholicism; another to inaugurate a movement for purifying the literature sold on railway trains. The most conspicuous proposition was a plan proposed "for the purchase of Ford's Theater and the erection of a building for

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the use of the Washington association, at a cost of \$100,000." It was very plain that the convention needed some guiding mind.

The committee on arrangements at Philadelphia, in planning to entertain the convention, had arranged to occupy most of the evenings. One evening was devoted to the welcome meeting, the next to the rendering of the oratorio of the Messiah, the third to the anniversary of the Ladies' Christian Commission, and Saturday afternoon to a mass meeting of the Sunday schools of Philadelphia. An invitation was accepted for the convention to hold its Saturday morning session at Spring Brook, the country residence of George H. Stuart. The New York members were all at the same hotel, and when it became evident that the convention was not to discuss the work of the Young Men's Christian Association, they determined to enter a protest. It was arranged that McBurney should go before the committee on associations and urge that time be given for the consideration of work for young men.

This resulted in a very important change in the international conventions. Prior to this time, "it had been customary to refer all questions presented by individual members to committees for report, instead of having a paper prepared and the topic discussed in the convention."

McBurney submitted a list of topics, to the discussion of which the Saturday evening session of the convention was devoted.

"1. The best method of bringing young men in cities under the influence of the associations.

“2. The best means of making the monthly meetings of the associations interesting and profitable.

“3. Are literary classes desirable, and if so, how should they be conducted?

“4. How shall young men be employed and retained in associations?

“5. What means shall be employed by associations for improving the social condition of young men?”

An interesting and valuable discussion followed the presentation of these topics, and from this time dates the directing of the convention program to a definite consideration of work for young men by young men.

The invitations for the eleventh convention created a lively scene. The struggle was between Albany and Montreal. In urging the cause of Montreal, one of the delegates imprudently remarked, “That as Montreal was neutral ground, our erring brothers from the South could meet us there without loss of self-respect.” The Albany delegates took prompt advantage of this remark, and said, “That we were unwilling to meet our Southern brothers on neutral ground, for if we could not meet them under the stars and stripes, we would not meet them at all.” This carried the convention to Albany. The reunion between the Northern and the Southern associations really did not take place until two years later at a convention held in Montreal, and in this McBurney had an important share.

In speaking of the Philadelphia convention, McBurney, some years later, said: “The im-

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pressions of the Philadelphia gathering as a convention were highly unsatisfactory. It was more useful in showing how a convention of Young Men's Christian Associations ought not to be held than of how it should be held. However, it brought forth some excellent fruit. The opposition to evening entertainments at a convention produced a lasting impression. The effect made on the New York delegation by the knowledge of the importance of bringing the international work into a high position was another excellent feature."

McBurney went home from his first international convention determined to do what he could for the work at large.

During the war many of the associations had disbanded, but they now began to increase rapidly in number and in membership.

The Albany convention in 1866 was in many respects one of the most important ever held. It may be looked upon as a turning-point in the history of the American associations. It resulted in the location of the international committee at New York City. McBurney said of it: "The reawakening of the associations to work at home for young men by young men dates from the Albany convention." It was at this gathering that McBurney proposed the plan of convention procedure which has become characteristic of Young Men's Christian Associations. On McBurney's motion the Albany convention created a committee for the consideration of the international committee's report. The office of this body was to take the report of the year's work presented to the convention at

the beginning of the session, digest it, and make recommendations based upon it. This line of procedure, running through the meeting from beginning to end, has since been characteristic of the international and state association gatherings. It constitutes the framework of the deliberative work of these bodies. Mr. Morse has called it "the backbone of the convention." This committee has always shared with the committee on organization the chief importance and determinative influence in the conventions.

At this convention the committee of which McBurney was chairman suggested the establishment of state conventions. While it had been recommended previously that local conventions be held, this was the origin of what is now known as state work.

McBurney introduced a resolution at this convention calling upon the associations and evangelical ministers of the world to observe a Sunday in November every year as a day of prayer for the increase and spiritual prosperity of the associations everywhere. This day became generally adopted by the associations in all lands. In the next convention, on a resolution by McBurney, it was resolved that an entire week in November be given to special prayer and efforts by the association for young men.

McBurney was again at Albany a member of the committee on nominations, and proved to be the important member. "Before the withdrawal of the committee for consultation," he relates, "I asked Mr. Brainerd who would make a good president. He said that H. Thane Mil-

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ler of Cincinnati was present, and that he was a good presiding officer. It was some time before the committee agreed to the nomination of Mr. Miller, but I pressed his name with pertinacity. I also presented the name of Mr. Miller to the convention and he was elected." H. Thane Miller attained a remarkable reputation as a presiding officer. He was tactful, and especially apt in harmonizing divergent interests. He would quiet controversy by calling for prayer, or for the singing of some pacifying hymn, in the heat of a discussion. Between McBurney and Mr. Miller a great intimacy and deep friendship arose which lasted throughout Mr. Miller's life. They addressed each other in terms of affectionate familiarity. Mr. Miller thought of McBurney as a father would of a son. Mr. Miller was chosen later a member of the international committee. He was the founder of the state work in Ohio, and did a great deal towards cementing the associations of the East and West. Although blind, he presided at four international conventions, and as ex-president attended all the conventions during his lifetime. He was always welcomed to the platform by his successors, and was far beyond all others the pre-eminent presiding officer of the American association movement.

The chief subject for discussion at the Albany convention was the true mission of the association. This found expression at the very beginning, in the address given by the retiring president, Mr. Brainerd. Speaking of this, McBurney said: "He struck the key-note for the present successful association movement



directly in behalf of young men. That address, in which Mr. Brainerd called the convention to order and amplified and emphasized the views he had advocated at former conventions, made a lasting impression on the work of the societies in North America." Mr. Brainerd said: "Our future progress rests upon an unswerving devotion to the primary objects and aims of these associations—the social, mental, and religious improvement of young men. As organizations with these avowed objects we challenge attention. As seeking these ends we are prominently before the world. Because of these things we are what we are. When we deviate from them we trench upon ground assigned to others."

Before going to the convention, McBurney arranged a list of subjects for discussion, as he feared the convention would assemble again without any topics having been prepared. This list of subjects was accepted by the committee on business. The first one was, "What is the True Aim of Young Men's Christian Associations and Their Primary Field of Labor?" This aroused an extended debate.

Prior to the Albany convention, the executive committees had been moved about from city to city. Each committee was appointed for but one year of office. To the executive committee which called the Albany convention this seemed an undesirable arrangement, and in their report presented by Rev. A. Taylor, of Philadelphia, they recommended a change by which the committee should be located for a term of years in one place, and that the place should be New York City. McBurney, as chair-

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man of the committee on the executive committee's report, recommended that in the future the committee be located in New York City. There was some opposition to locating it there permanently, and it was voted to appoint an international committee with headquarters in New York for three years. Its continuance there was voted in 1869, 1872, 1875, 1879, and 1881. In 1883 the act incorporating the committee and locating it permanently in New York was accepted and adopted by the convention.

While neither Mr. Brainerd nor McBurney were made members of this committee at the convention, Mr. Brainerd became its corresponding secretary for the first year. The following year he was elected chairman, a position which he continued to occupy for twenty-five years. McBurney attended the committee meetings from the beginning as its corresponding member for New York state. He was elected to the committee at Portland in 1869. This brought him into close touch with the machinery of the international work, and gave him an opportunity to exercise a large influence in its development.

The twelfth convention was held at Montreal, and was the first convention to which the New York committee made a report. McBurney, while not as yet a full member of the committee, had been deeply interested in its activities. He was particularly interested in the revival of work in the South. In response to a circular calling the convention, the Charleston association had written that it very much desired being represented at Montreal, but financial circum-

stances forbade its sending delegates. McBurney says: "I immediately went to one or two friends, and told them the facts. Before an hour from the receipt of the letter had elapsed, a telegram was sent, saying, 'Come at our expense. I send you tickets to-night. You will be our guests from the time you leave until you reach Charleston again.' Four delegates came, and their presence at Montreal contributed great additional interest. This was the resuming of hearty fraternal relations between the Northern and Southern Associations."

An interesting scene occurred at the Montreal convention when Major-General W. T. Gregory of Fredericksburg reported for Virginia. General Gregory's speech was received with hearty applause. At its close, Mr. E. V. C. Eato, colored, president of the colored association of New York City, arose to respond. He was asked to go forward. As he reached the platform, General Gregory stepped forward and took him by the hand. The convention as by an inspiration arose, handkerchiefs waving throughout the house, and the entire audience united in singing, "Say, Brothers, Will You Meet Us?" The scene was an affecting one.

McBurney says: "When we reached Montreal, we found a great deal of bitterness emanating from Albany touching the views which had been advanced upon the question of amusements. The Albany delegates who favored a rigid policy were determined to elect a president. There was also a man from another prominent association who had been seeking his own election. He had written letters to

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some gentlemen on the subject. I deeply felt the importance of securing the election of a competent presiding officer, and that neither of these gentlemen was fitted for the position. Mr. and Mrs. H. Thane Miller were stopping at St. Lawrence Hall. Knowing the opposition of the Troy brethren on the question of amusements, and fearful that they would be much hurt, I found Mr. Clegg, the president of the Troy association. With Mr. Miller, we went over the whole question in my bedroom, and spent much time in prayer. Our conference did not close until one o'clock in the morning. We saw no light in regard to the person who should be selected. It was agreed that Mr. Clegg should offer the resolution, appointing a nominating committee. At the beginning of the session, Mr. Miller's opening address, in which he described losing his sight, melted every heart. Men were in tears throughout the audience. Mr. Clegg offered the resolution that the chair appoint a nominating committee, consisting of one delegate from each state. A representative from Albany immediately arose and moved as an amendment that the members on the committee be appointed not by the chair, but by the delegates from each state. The amendment created much discussion. I arose and said that whatever might be the opinion of the gentleman from Albany in regard to the fairness of the presiding officer (Mr. Miller), the delegates of the convention had no sympathy with the distrust implied in the amendment. The convention did not know, as I did, that Albany was seeking to get the presidency.

This statement provoked something of a sensation and much impatience on the part of the conference. The amendment was lost overwhelmingly, and the original resolution adopted. So much sympathy for Mr. Miller was awakened that as soon as the nominating committee retired, many members of the convention hastened to the committee and urged the renomination of Mr. Miller." The committee presented Mr. Miller's name, which was received with spontaneous and enthusiastic bursts of applause.

It became the custom of the international conventions for the president-elect to have a conference after the first evening session, with a few representatives from the different states, in order to select the members of the various standing committees. McBurney was always present at these conferences, and his wide acquaintance with association workers made him an important factor in selecting these committees from year to year.

Speaking of the Montreal convention, McBurney said: "This convention was the largest we had held. Many persons went for mere pleasure seeking, and nearly swamped the Montreal association. Many of the delegates behaved in a manner quite unbecoming delegates to a Christian association convention, absenting themselves from the sessions, driving about the city, and running up bills at the hotels, at the expense of the association.

"The convention was more extensively reported in American newspapers, religious and secular, than any preceding it. The result was, that information in regard to the movement

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was scattered broadcast over the whole country. More associations were organized between the Montreal and the following convention than in any former decade. Some of these were organized without proper means being provided for their support. The convention was certainly the most dramatic I have ever attended. The spirit of the Lord was present in the meetings, and many dated the beginning of their Christian life to that memorable gathering."

The attendance upon these three conventions, at Philadelphia, Albany, and Montreal, during the years the New York association was entering upon its building canvass, helped to make McBurney a leader among men. He responded to the impulse of the association movement throughout the continent. The convention became one of the channels through which he learned of the condition of the associations. He formed acquaintances which extended his influence, and he gradually found himself in an ever-widening fellowship which his strong personality enabled him to direct and mould. Probably no association leader had attended as many and as varied association conventions as McBurney had at the time of his death. These early conventions prepared him for his international service.

## CHAPTER II

### THE EVANGELICAL AND EVANGELISTIC CONTROVERSIES

THE SECURING OF ROBERT WEIDENSALL AND  
RICHARD C. MORSE

The Young Men's Christian Association has been singularly free from theological disputes. It is a practical organization established for philanthropic and evangelistic work, and has neither the equipment nor the experience fitting it to consider doctrinal questions.

There have been two important controversies in which McBurney took a prominent part: one theological, and the other touching the scope of the association's work. The theological question resulted in determining the doctrinal basis of the association, and was practically settled before 1870. The practical question with regard to the aim and scope of the movement was agitated in the American association from the very first, and cannot be said to have been finally settled until about 1880. Here we will recall McBurney's relations to these two great questions, considering first the doctrinal basis of the American organizations.

The first world's convention, which was held at Paris in 1855, formulated the historic basis of the movement: "The Young Men's Christian Associations seek to unite those young men who, regarding Jesus Christ as their God



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and Saviour according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be his disciples, in their doctrine and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of his kingdom among young men." This is the basis on the continent of Europe. In Great Britain active members "must give decided evidence of conversion to God."

When the American movement began at Montreal and Boston, the Montreal constitution made no requirement except good character. The Boston association originated the idea of limiting active membership to young men who were members of evangelical churches. This plan was followed in New York City until 1865, and after a brief trial of a broader basis, was readopted.

At the first American convention, at Buffalo in 1854, a resolution was introduced urging the associations to accept an evangelical basis, but the convention was absorbed with other questions, and while it recommended an evangelical basis, it stated :\* "This convention is decidedly of the opinion that the qualifications for the different kinds of membership can be best determined by each association for itself, and that uniformity of action cannot without greater experience be asked or expected."

In the mean time a variety of practices had sprung up among the different associations. Cincinnati required all members to be members of evangelical churches. A number of associations simply required good character, while several only required that officers and members

\*First Report, page 59.

of the board should be members of evangelical churches.

While there is no record that McBurney opposed the adoption in New York City of the broader basis in 1865, it is plain that he early perceived the vital importance of this question. His own convictions became stronger and stronger that the association must identify itself with the evangelical church. With him this was not a question of policy, although nearly ninety-eight per cent of American Protestants were evangelical, but it was a question of principle. He believed the perpetuity of the association depended upon this issue. His first efforts were in connection with the work in New York state.

Among the significant contributions which the Albany convention made to association work was the recommendation, introduced on McBurney's motion, that the corresponding members of the international committee in the different districts and states should call state conventions. At the international convention at Albany McBurney brought together the delegates present from New York state, and they arranged to hold the first state convention at Oswego, a city which then had no association. McBurney, who was the corresponding member of the international committee for New York state, made the arrangements for this convention. It was his province to call the convention to order, and in doing so he read a short address in which he urged the importance of keeping the work true to its primary object.

In the course of this convention a clergyman

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from Auburn introduced a resolution as follows: "That we believe the admission of unconverted young men to active membership in our association is inconsistent with the spirit of our organizations." This resolution was referred to the committee on associations, which stated in its report on the succeeding day that "in the opinion of this committee none but Christian young men should be admitted to active membership in these associations."

In calling the second New York state convention, which was held in Elmira in the fall of 1867, McBurney prepared a list of topics for consideration, among which was, "What Should Be the Test of Active Membership in Young Men's Christian Associations?" McBurney opened the discussion of this question, and urged the limiting of active members "to those who are members in good standing in evangelical churches." The discussion following showed a variety of views. Finally, after reference to a special committee, a resolution was reported approving of the plan then held to in New York City, namely, that all young men of good moral character be eligible to active membership and the voting power, but that only members in good and regular standing in evangelical churches be eligible to office. This, however, did not suit McBurney, and he spoke against the adoption of the report. He proposed as a substitute the declaration of the Oswego convention, namely, that "we believe the admission of unconverted young men to active membership in our associations is inconsistent with the spirit of our organi-

zations." This was followed by a long and animated discussion. A clergyman from Saratoga said, "The distinction between active and associate members is a dead letter with the smaller bodies. This invidious distinction has driven away young men. It is a mistake to try to make the association a church." Another minister said, "We cannot grow on this narrow basis; let all be active members."

After eight speeches had been made, McBurney called for the previous question, but as objection was raised to this, he was led to make one of his few stirring convention addresses. He rose, and with great earnestness said: "I consider this to be the most important question that can engage the attention of this convention, affecting vitally the very existence of our associations. I deny, as has been remarked, that the opposition to the report of the committee is based on what my brother has been pleased to style a 'property bugbear.' The bugbear is the honor of the cross of Christ. Are we prepared to allow these associations as identified with his cause, to be placed under the control and government of those whom he has clearly defined as his enemies? He tells us, we have it from his own lips, that 'no man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.' And yet in view of these teachings of our Lord, not to be misunderstood, there are brethren here who appeal to us to manifest a broad and liberal spirit by admitting to active membership, giving the

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right to vote, and thus the control of these agencies which God has been pleased in such a remarkable manner to bless in the extension of his kingdom among young men, to those whom Christ himself has declared to be his enemies. I am not here to-day, as has been intimated, to ask for any favors or concessions on the part of the larger associations—they are able to protect themselves—but I stand before you to plead the cause of the smaller societies and of earnest young men loving the Lord Jesus Christ, who are here to-day contemplating the organization of Young Men's Christian Associations in their towns, and who came hither seeking information in relation to the mode of organizing and carrying forward the work for which such societies are instituted.

“It has been stated that associations in small towns cannot sustain themselves if they do not confer the right to vote on irreligious young men seeking admission to them, and that the societies denying this right do not give young men sufficient for their money. Who will say that men renting pews in this church, and not members, sitting Sunday after Sunday under the preaching of the gospel of Christ, do not get sufficient in return for their money because they cannot elect the pastor, the deacons, or elders, and control its government? What kind of churches and preaching would we have if these modern liberal ideas were adopted? Let us firmly and unceasingly maintain the standard which the associations on this continent have ever held. Let us so act on this question that it may not be the painful duty of a member of

any Young Men's Christian Association of this state at the next convention to say, 'we followed the advice of your committee, and our association has lost its Christian character.'" This speech turned the tide of the convention. Only remarks in support of the evangelical position followed, and McBurney's amendment was adopted.

The following February a strong article advocating the evangelical basis for active membership in the association, prepared by Cephas Brainerd, appeared in the *Quarterly*. Mr. Brainerd had in the New York board opposed the broader basis which was adopted in 1865, and without doubt had a strong influence over McBurney's convictions on this question. In the mean time the question had become a very live one throughout the country. In 1868 reports were received from two hundred and sixteen associations in America. Of these, three had no test for membership, sixty-seven required good moral character, four required active members to have Christian character, and one hundred and forty-two, or sixty-five per cent, required for active membership, membership in evangelical churches.

The international convention that year was to be held at Detroit. McBurney was made first vice-president of this convention. With the hearty approval of McBurney and all the members of the international committee, a resolution had been prepared by the chairman, Mr. Brainerd, on the evangelical basis. This resolution was incorporated in the report made by the committee to the convention as follows:

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“That a resolution be adopted by the convention to the effect that membership in good standing in an evangelical church should be the unvarying test of active membership in the Young Men’s Christian Associations.”

“That a resolution be adopted instructing the executive committee and the corresponding members to use all reasonable and proper measures to secure the adoption of this test by all the associations, and especially to strive to obtain its incorporation in the most permanent form in the constitutions of such associations as may hereafter be formed.” McBurney was active in making sentiment at the Detroit convention in behalf of this resolution.

Some years later a prominent secretary, who was then a member of the Pittsburg association, related: “In 1867 the requisite for active membership in the Pittsburg association was simply good moral character. The next year, 1868, I went to my first convention at Detroit, where they brought up the proposition for the evangelical test of active membership. I had been active before I became a Christian, which was not for some time afterwards. I went to the convention to oppose this proposition as strongly as I knew how, resolved that I was going to do my level best to prevent its adoption. McBurney heard of it in some way, and got Mr. Brainerd to come and have a personal talk with me on the subject. McBurney also talked with me. They both impressed me so much, and the rest of the large delegation from Pittsburg, that we stood behind the New York men in pushing through the resolution.”



Mr. J. H. Cheever of Cincinnati was chairman of the committee on the report of the executive committee. In his reminiscences of the early conventions, prepared about 1885, McBurney, in speaking of the action on the evangelical test at Detroit, states: "I wrote a resolution on this subject and handed it to Mr. Cheever, chairman of the committee on the executive committee's report. It will be found on page 94, fourth paragraph, of the convention report." The resolution was as follows: "Resolved, as these organizations bear the name of Christian, and profess to be engaged directly in the Saviour's service, so it is clearly their duty to maintain the control and management of all their affairs in the hands of those who love and publicly avow their faith in Jesus, the Redeemer, as divine, and who testify their faith by becoming and remaining members of churches held to be evangelical, and that such persons and no others should be allowed to vote or hold office." This resolution, in addition to the one prepared by Mr. Brainerd which has already been quoted, was adopted at the Detroit convention. Thus ended the first act in this important controversy.

At this convention McBurney added another to the many services which he rendered the association cause. Speaking of this gathering in his reminiscences he says: "Before going to the convention, Mr. S. A. Kean of Chicago called on me and urged the importance of a mission to the young men on the lines of the Pacific railroad. The suggestion commended itself to my judgment and I immediately pro-

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ceeded to secure contributions for this purpose. In a short time I had obtained \$800. When I went to the convention I asked Mr. Kean to offer a resolution instructing the executive committee to employ a man on the line of the Pacific railroad. This he declined to do, and I offered the resolution, which was adopted."

Mr. Brainerd opened correspondence with the leaders at Omaha, which resulted in the employment of Robert Weidensall, who became the first paid agent of the affiliated Young Men's Christian Associations of America. Mr. Weidensall was a pioneer in work for young men. He foresaw many of the association's developments and led in them. He has been called the "bishop of the West" and the "prophet" of the association movement.

The culminating stage in the development of the evangelical controversy took place at the Portland convention in 1869. Most of those friendly to having the association placed upon an evangelical basis regarded the question as settled by the Detroit convention, and there was no expectation of any further discussion. The international committee in its report proposed the reaffirmation of the resolution on the evangelical basis adopted at Detroit. When this was proposed, some one asked for a statement of the resolution, which was accordingly read. This prompted Major-General O. O. Howard of Washington to inquire, "What is an evangelical church? Is it one whose members love the Lord Jesus Christ?" Mr. H. Thane Miller called out from the floor, "That is just it." This led to an historic discussion. A clergyman from

Fall River, Mass., declared, "There are many Unitarians in our churches and associations who love the Lord Jesus Christ as much as any of us. The report just made excludes from our associations many excellent men. All who recognize the Lord Jesus Christ as Redeemer should be admitted." A clergyman from Wheeling, W. Va., declared with some vehemence, "I deny that any man can love the Lord Jesus who denies that he is the Son of the living God. If a man denies him the crown of divinity, he robs him of his glory, and I cannot associate with him in Christian fellowship." This utterance provoked great applause and immense enthusiasm. Rev. J. M. Buckley rose and said: "There may be, and doubtless are, people in the Unitarian and Universalist churches, and the outside world, too, who may be in sympathy with our Jesus, but no real logical Unitarian ever will express belief in the crucifixion of Christ as his redemption from sin. While there may be some good moral Unitarians, it is unsafe to take them into our full fraternity." Rev. Howard Crosby, D.D., of New York City, proposed that evangelical churches be defined as "those churches which believe in the atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ as our Divine Redeemer, received by faith as the sole source of salvation from eternal death." Perhaps the most convincing speech in support of the evangelical basis was made by Cephas Brainerd, chairman of the International Committee, although the record of this was omitted in the printed report.

Several efforts were now made to remove the question from the floor by referring it to a com-

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mittee. The discussion had been carried on chiefly by clergymen. A minister from Providence now rose and said: "This question is all-important, and we should be very cautious in approaching it. It has divided and sub-divided the Christian church for fifteen hundred years, and still agitates it." He moved that the question be referred to a special committee to report. This was carried.

At this critical moment, McBurney who had been following the debate with the deepest interest, secured the floor, and took the liberty to suggest the members of this committee. He moved that the special committee consist of Rev. Howard Crosby of New York, Rev. S. H. Lee of Greenfield, Mass., Rev. G. M. Grant of Halifax, Rev. D. C. Kellogg of Providence, and Major-General O. O. Howard of Washington—all clergymen except one. Dr. Crosby reported for this committee that "we hold those churches to be evangelical which, maintaining the Holy Scriptures to be the only infallible rule of faith and practice, do believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (the only begotten of the Father, King of kings and Lord of lords, in whom dwells the fullness of the godhead bodily, and who was made sin for us, though knowing no sin, bearing our sins in his own body on the tree,) as the only name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved from everlasting punishment." The vote upon the acceptance of this formula was unanimous, the convention giving vent to its enthusiasm by spontaneously rising and singing the hymn Coronation, "All hail the power of Jesus' name." "I have frequently heard that

hymn sung," said McBurney, "but never so enthusiastically or with more emotion. Strong men wept like children, and I realized that the action of the Portland convention would make an indelible mark upon the association movement of the continent. These expectations were more than realized. From this convention has dated a permanent growth and a sympathy and co-operation on the part of the evangelical pastors such as the associations had not experienced before."

The convention followed up this resolution by enacting that of associations organized in the future, only those established on an evangelical basis should be admitted to the international convention. This practically settled the evangelical controversy in America, and though it was some years before there was uniformity, the movement has since been identified with the evangelical church.

Mr. Morse, some years afterward, in speaking of this controversy, said: "The correspondence of the international committee early in the '70's shows that there was a good deal of protest against this test. In not a few cities attempt was made to organize and carry on the work without it. But not enough dissent was manifested to create any serious discussion in any of the state or international conventions, and experimentation by local associations invariably brought the association back to the evangelical basis. It was the associations with this test that secured secretaries and buildings—in other words, the men and the money necessary to carry on the work. The associations attempted upon

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other tests failed in the direction of both men and money."

For three years the international committee had been located in New York City. It had already in its employ a traveling secretary in the West, but its work of administration and correspondence was carried on gratuitously by Mr. Brainerd, the details of which, however, were becoming arduous for a lawyer in active practice.

On motion of McBurney at the Albany convention, in 1866, the committee had been instructed to publish a quarterly. This had been done with success for three years. The convention at Portland passed a resolution instructing the committee to change the periodical to a monthly, and authorizing the committee "to employ a person to act as its secretary and perform such editorial and other duties as it may assign to him in the prosecution of the business with which they are charged." This action led to a development of great importance, both to the association work at large and to McBurney personally. In the person of Richard C. Morse, he secured his closest friend, and the associations a general secretary for the international committee. Speaking of this event McBurney said, "The year following the Portland convention compassed one of the most marked achievements in the history of the associations of North America in securing to association work Richard C. Morse."

Mr. Morse and McBurney were already somewhat acquainted. At that time Mr. Morse was assistant editor of the New York Observer.



*Life of Robert R. McBurney*

He was a graduate of Yale and an alumnus of both Princeton and Union Theological Seminaries. He was already succeeding in the sphere of religious journalism. He first met McBurney in 1865, when he went to the rooms to secure a boarding-house for a young man from the country. McBurney helped him in his usual courteous way. Later he became an active member of the association.

In 1867 a general religious convention was held in New York City, of which McBurney was one of the committee of management. Mr. Morse attended this and wrote it up with such accuracy for the New York Observer that it attracted McBurney's special attention. The following year McBurney sought to inaugurate some open-air meetings in Washington Square. Speaking of this, McBurney said: "When our open-air work commenced I went to the office of the Observer to secure Mr. Morse's co-operation in that work. In this interview he completely won my heart by the sympathetic spirit which he manifested in regard to the undertaking. He agreed to come to the open-air meeting provided he would not be called upon to speak. Before the close of the meeting, however, he asked to be allowed to say a few words. His address was most fervent and effective."

When it was proposed to secure a secretary for the international committee who should also be editor of the association paper, McBurney at once thought of Mr. Morse. He says, "I pressed his name on the committee for the editorship." In the mean time Mr. Morse's





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interest in the association cause had been increasing. Speaking of this Mr. Morse said: "I remember being deeply stirred by the accounts of the Portland convention in the summer of 1869. I read of the adoption of the evangelical test. My brother-in-law, an old association leader, said of it, 'That shows the association has got onto the right track and is going to keep on it.' A little while after this McBurney came to the office with a distinct errand for me. He said the international committee wanted to make their paper a monthly, and the committee wanted me to become its editor; that he thought of me as the best person of his acquaintance to take hold of the work on account of my experience in the office of the Observer." For a time Mr. Morse was unwilling to entertain this project.

When one recalls that in 1869 the Young Men's Christian Association was an immature and comparatively unknown religious movement, it is not surprising that the friends of a man with a thorough university and seminary education, who was in the line of promotion on a metropolitan religious journal, should have urged that there was no opportunity for a career of marked usefulness in taking such a step. But Mr. Brainerd and McBurney both urged the matter earnestly upon Mr. Morse, and he finally drew up a plan embodying his idea of how to conduct the paper. Mr. Morse says: "When I went before the committee to explain my plan, they accepted it, and renewed their invitation to me. I said I would accept on the first of December, 1869, and issue the paper on the first of

January. That same December the New York association moved into the Twenty-third Street building, and the room over McBurney's office was assigned to the international committee free of rent, and we occupied it for many years. That was the beginning of my close acquaintance with McBurney."

Mr. Morse, with the most self-denying and arduous labor, conducted the monthly for the years 1870 and 1871, securing sufficient advertisements to make it pay its way, and at the same time doing the work of editor. But he did not feel equal to continuing permanently as both editor and publisher. He spent the first part of 1872 in visiting as the agent of the committee the associations in New England and the Maritime Provinces, and in that year he accepted the invitation of the committee to devote his entire time to its service as its general executive secretary, a position which he has since occupied.

The friendship for Mr. Morse was the closest attachment which McBurney formed. He sometimes clashed with others of his friends, but these two worked in thorough harmony throughout McBurney's life. Between them there was a strong affinity, and their aptitudes and proficiencies were mutually supplemental.

From the time that McBurney won Mr. Morse for the service, they worked together unitedly in the American, the European, and the world work. It is hard to differentiate between the influence of each: often their influence was joint. Speaking of his sense of indebtedness to McBurney, Mr. Morse has said:

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“I came to him a college boy with very little experience of men and things compared with what he had. He was older in life than I. Ever since his seventeenth year he had been knocking around among men and taking care of himself, so he was far older in practical affairs. I was general secretary of the international committee and had never been a local secretary. I had never struggled with local problems. My intimate association with him, as he was working out the association’s idea in its fourfold development, gave me a practical knowledge, without which my whole life work would have lacked its very kernel.”

McBurney was unstinted in his expressions of regard and appreciation of Mr. Morse. In his reminiscences he says: “The association monthly was the means God used in securing the most valuable man who has become identified with our work. . . . I have had very close intercourse with him for many years, and desire to say that I never came in contact with a man more unselfish, more sympathetic, or more ardent in the work of the Lord. The greater the difficulties which concern a problem in which he is engaged, the more he strains to the accomplishment of the object. He has the faculty of making everybody’s struggles his own, and lifting others out of difficulties from which they cannot extricate themselves. His nature is truly a vicarious nature, more so than that of any man I ever knew.

“The securing of Mr. Morse was certainly the most valuable acquisition to the association yet received. In Mr. Morse the associations of

America realized the longing of Nasmith when he said, in 1838, 'My deep regret is that no apostle of young men's societies has arisen and thrown his whole soul and mind, as well as time, into them, that their important designs might be carried out with effect.' How fully this has been realized in him, the condition of the associations in our land and the development and organization of affiliated association work on the continent of Europe and in the world, bear ample testimony." McBurney once said, "The best thing I ever did was to get Mr. Morse into association work."

The second great question of policy during these years related to the aim of the association, and the character of its work. Should the associations engage in general evangelistic work for all classes, or should their work be a specialized, organized effort for the creation and culture of Christian young manhood?

McBurney's attitude on this question is seen in his work as secretary of the New York City association. He pressed his convictions with equal determination upon the associations at large. One of the difficulties of a clear definition upon this issue lay in the fact that those in sympathy with limiting the association to work among young men were usually in sympathy with general evangelistic work, provided it should be carried on under the auspices of the church. They hesitated to appear to oppose a work which they believed was of vital importance. On the other hand, those who advocated the general evangelistic work were, most of them, equally enthusiastic over the associations

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doing a symmetrical, all-round work for young men. The issue finally narrowed itself to whether general evangelistic work was a proper sphere in which the Young Men's Christian Association should engage.

Two men and two buildings stood out in 1870 for these two tendencies: one the building erected at Chicago under the leadership of Mr. Moody, who was then president and general secretary of the Chicago association; the other the building on Twenty-third Street, New York.

The great work at this time in the Chicago association consisted in evangelistic endeavor. Mr. Moody preached every Sunday evening to a large general audience, and went out during the week to neighboring towns for similar service. The constitution of the Chicago association had been so altered as to state that the mission of the organization was "to all within the reach of the association, without distinction of sex, age, or condition." In the Chicago building there were no appliances for educational work, no gymnasium, and little or no library. It was for some years the headquarters for the charitable work of the city. Mr. Moody was beginning there his great life work as an evangelist.

The work of the New York building has already been fully described. Which of the two types represented by these two typical men and two typical buildings was to prevail in the association movement became a foremost subject for discussion and experimentation during the decade following 1870. Both plans of work



were discussed on the floors of the international convention and in the state conventions. These tendencies did not organize themselves into well-defined parties, but there was a disposition on the part of one group to urge the association, in its state and local work, to push various forms of general evangelistic endeavor; while the tendency of the other group was to push the organization of local associations, the erection of buildings, the securing of general secretaries, and the development of the physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual work for young men.

At the Albany convention, in 1866, Mr. Moody, in urging the general work, had said, "God wants us to go forth and preach the gospel to the whole world." Referring to this incident, McBurney afterwards wrote: "Mr. Dwight L. Moody took a very active part in the Albany convention, and urged the associations to engage in nearly all kinds of Christian work. I opposed his view so earnestly that he considered I was opposed to him personally, and stated this to me on his return from Albany; but this was not the case." McBurney's deep sympathy with Mr. Moody and his evangelistic work was shown at the time of the Moody meetings in New York, and later in connection with the college conferences at Northfield.

Mr. Moody soon severed official connection with the Chicago association for a life work as an evangelist. In this capacity he was always friendly to the associations in the towns he visited. He delivered many from debt, established many new associations, and secured funds for the erection of buildings. In America and the

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British Isles, he raised money for the erection of more buildings for Young Men's Christian Associations than has been raised by any other individual. Speaking of his work, Mr. Morse remarks: "It might be said that Mr. Moody influenced the spiritual life and activity of enough association secretaries to make it true of him that he leavened the working force of the associations with a spiritual influence." McBurney said of him, in his historical sketch of the associations: "It is certainly worthy of mention that Mr. Moody, who has been such a wonderful blessing to the church of Christ in this generation, testifies, 'The Young Men's Christian Association has under God done more in developing me for Christian work than any other agency.' On the other hand, it should be said that the associations on both sides of the sea owe very much to Mr. Moody for the spiritual life that he has been the means of infusing into their membership and agencies, and also for the material aid which he has secured for them along the pathway of his active work."

In the mean time a great wave of interest in fervent evangelistic effort swept over the associations in the states of Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio in the West, and the six New England states in the East. Delegations of young men went out from the strong city associations to conduct evangelistic meetings in the churches of neighboring towns, and the movement took on the nature of a general revival. For some time this tendency seemed dominant, but the international committee never gave it its allegiance. The states of New York and Penn-

sylvania turned their attention definitely to building up a specialized work for young men. In his historical sketch of the association, McBurney says, "From the beginning of the association movement, there seemed to be a disposition to give much attention to general forms of religious and philanthropic work, carried on chiefly by young men but not for them." At the international conventions of Poughkeepsie, Dayton, Richmond, Toronto, and Louisville, covering the years 1873 to 1877, the leaders particularly urged this form of effort. Some of the state committees gave their chief attention to stimulating the holding of general evangelistic meetings. These committees thus constituted themselves a mission to the churches rather than a mission to young men. The almost total neglect by some state committees of specific association work hindered the associations within the jurisdiction of these committees from keeping pace with the group in other sections. It is not doubted but that vast good was done by this general evangelistic work, but the association cause suffered very much by this divergence.

State Secretary Taggart, of Pennsylvania, while a man with evangelistic gifts, was one of the effective agents in turning the tide towards organized work for young men.

One of the most influential papers which McBurney ever prepared was upon this subject. It was presented before the New York state convention in 1877, and was circulated through the whole association brotherhood. In this paper he made a comparison between the sec-

tions of the country where organized, specialized work for young men was carried on, and the sections where a general evangelistic work was the chief feature. In this paper he said: "The general policy of the New York state association work, touching evangelistic effort, has been conservative, thus commending our cause to the favor of the ministry, and to the best element in our churches. In work for young men, we have been absorbed and aggressive, and in this the associations have simply sought to do the work for which they honestly claim to be organized. They have never esteemed themselves to be a mission to the church, but a mission of the church for reaching young men. The confidence awakened by this course has given the associations of New York a pre-eminence and an intelligent, liberal constituency. This is one reason why more money in aid of the association cause has been given by our state than by any other. As a result of this honest emphasis laid by the associations of New York upon work for young men, not only do they own more property in buildings than any other state, but there has been such a demand for Christian young men to devote their whole time as general secretaries to the organizing and pushing of this work, that in the cities of New York there are now twenty such officers employed by individual societies—a greater number than in any other state.

"Methods of state work have occupied considerable prominence in the discussions of the international convention, especially for the past five years. Let us select two representative

methods: state work in New England on the one hand, and state work in Pennsylvania on the other—they represent divergent ideas.

“The New England work has been instrumental in leading many souls to Christ, and has quickened many churches. This work, however, can in no sense be considered distinctively associational, but should be termed general evangelistic. In carrying out the New England plan, invitations are extended to the churches, or associations, or both, to the effect that the state secretary and committee are prepared to hold evangelistic services in their communities. The committee then selects from the favorable responses a number sufficient to occupy the labors of the year, going to each place from three days to a week. In these meetings no special emphasis is laid upon work for young men, no attention is given to instructing or stimulating associations; indeed, except that those engaged in the work are generally members of local associations, and are sent out by state conventions bearing our name, the work cannot be considered as belonging to our societies. It is practically a mission to churches and communities generally, and not distinctively to young men or Young Men’s Christian Associations. It does not call for organization or increased vigor in the operation of local associations. This constitutes the weakness of the method pursued in New England.

“The Pennsylvania plan of state work, on the other hand, is primarily a mission to young men and to Young Men’s Christian Associations. The success of this work depends in the main

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upon the vigor, organization, and methods of individual associations. The chief aim of the Pennsylvania committee and its state secretary is to bring the local associations up to the highest point of efficiency, and enable them to go forward in continuous, aggressive effort three hundred and sixty-five days in the year."

McBurney then went on to show how the Pennsylvania associations had increased in the number of general secretaries, in the efficiency of their work, and in the property which they had acquired. He continues the comparison further:

"The New England state committees claim that the general evangelistic method will open the way so that ultimately the work for young men will be greatly strengthened and helped. This practical result has not been obtained. The associations of these states are no stronger than when the state committees began their labors. There are not so many associations existing in these states as there were several years ago. There has also been in New England a falling off instead of an increase in the number of general secretaries. If the work for young men is really making genuine advance upon the tidal wave of evangelistic effort, which has been kept in motion the past five years by the evangelistic state committees in New England, it is certainly singular that the individual associations have not sought and found general secretaries for their local home work.

"We have instituted this comparison that we might discover what is the practical outcome of the different methods in the sections compared. No other inference is open to us from the facts



presented but that we should emphasize and multiply in our work the agencies seeking the benefit of young men. The more exclusively and energetically we give ourselves to this work, the more shall we secure the blessing of God upon ourselves as laborers together with him, and upon the young men whose salvation we seek, and upon the churches whose messengers we are."

One incident connected with this discussion occurred at a secretarial conference in 1875, when an evangelistic state secretary had been giving a report of the revivals which followed his visits. McBurney asked him how many places he had visited during the year. He replied, "Sixty, seventy, or eighty." "Did you visit the associations in these towns?" asked McBurney. "Seldom," was the reply. "I scarcely remember being in one of the association rooms." McBurney then asked: "Now, if a man loved a girl, and had visited the town in which she lived seventy or eighty times without going to see her, what would you think of that man?"

The paper read by McBurney in New York was carefully read by the leaders in New England, and in 1879, at a conference held in Providence, to which McBurney as well as Mr. Morse were invited, a state secretary was called by the Massachusetts and Rhode Island state committee, with instructions to devote himself chiefly to association work. In 1882 the Chicago association modified its constitution so as to make the object of its work especially for young men.

During these years McBurney gave himself



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heart and soul to the development of the association cause throughout the country. He visited state conventions, corresponded with leading workers all over this country and in other lands, and at the international conventions was always alert for what he considered the good of the cause. At the convention held in Toronto in 1877, he met what he considered a serious defeat. Looking at it calmly from this distance of time, one is inclined to feel that McBurney was in the wrong. The issue at the convention was over the question of whether the committee for nominating permanent officers, which consisted of a delegate from each state or province, should be appointed, as had been the custom, by the retiring president, or nominated by the different delegations and elected by the convention. McBurney felt that those advocating this change sought to wrest the control of the convention and the policy of the association from those who had so long guided it. He believed particularly that certain leaders in the West wished to introduce revolutionary changes, and so he opposed this plan strongly. It is true that the new plan was pretty largely advocated by the representatives of what might be spoken of as the evangelistic element in the association—those who wished to make the association a general evangelistic agency for all classes.

Immediately after the Toronto convention was called to order, and the usual resolution had been introduced, authorizing the appointment of a committee to nominate permanent officers for the convention, a resolution was

offered, "That this committee be nominated by the different states and provinces represented." This new plan was strongly urged by Dr. L. W. Munhall of Indianapolis. McBurney saw that the convention sympathized with the proposition, and so took the position that if this plan was to be adopted, it ought to be made to apply to future conventions and not to the present one. In opposing it he said:\* "We have been associated in this work for twenty years, and I deprecate any hasty action this morning touching this matter. There is a great deal of force in what Mr. Munhall has said; I recognize that fact. If it is desirable that a change should be made in the method we have invariably pursued since the beginning of these conventions, let it be made. But, sir, I think this is neither the place nor the time to make it. . . . When we come to business regularly and calmly to-morrow or next day, we shall consider what is the best plan, and if after hearing all sides carefully, we should decide that hereafter the state conventions should make the nominations, I for one should say amen; but this morning I think it would be unwise for us to change, without long and more careful consideration, a plan which we have pursued steadily for twenty years. Now, brethren, let us weigh the matter. I hope that those of you who know me know that I seek to speak this morning in the interest of our entire cause."

Several addresses for and against the new plan followed these remarks, but finally a resolution was passed to organize as usual, and

\*Report Toronto convention, page 29.

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to make the plan of organization of future conventions the special order for consideration on the following Friday morning at 11 o'clock. When the question came up for final consideration, Dr. Munhall made an extended address, advocating the change. A number of speeches were made on both sides, and finally Mr. Deming of Boston rose to move the previous question. Before it was seconded McBurney secured the floor, but cries for the question prevented his being heard, and the president ruled him out of order. An appeal was made from this decision, but the chair was sustained. The previous question was seconded, and the motion to inaugurate the new plan for appointing a nominating committee was adopted. At the next session the chair apologized for having refused to give McBurney the floor, and stated that he was not out of order, but was entitled to speak.

Another resolution which was presented, but defeated, proposed to change the test of membership by substituting the word "persons" for the words "young men" in the test for active membership, thus admitting women to membership.

When the next convention was to assemble, McBurney felt the necessity of rallying all the older members of the international committee to attend. One of his letters to a member of the committee shows how strongly he felt the importance of the committee's asserting itself. On May twenty-ninth, 1877, he wrote as follows: "I am not an alarmist, yet I must say very frankly that the Louisville prospect is most discouraging indeed. There will be few of the old men at

Louisville whose words carried weight with the delegates of days now gone. We met with a most disastrous defeat at Toronto. You were unfortunately not present, and never seemed to realize the injurious influences which there gained control. There is now a decided opposition, organized, aggressive, and for a most clearly defined object. This opposition relies for success on wire-pulling for the nominating committee. But this is a small part as compared with the other objects, namely: first, the committees of the convention will have the shaping of all the work for the year; second, the capture of the executive committee to such an extent as to give the influence and increased control to views differing very widely from those thus far presented and urged. . . . I have no desire to go to Louisville to be captured, or see the cause captured, without a reasonable opposition. It will be too bad to see the work of ten years wiped out, at least so far as the future is concerned, in a day. If the opposition were merely personal, I should not feel so deeply, but it strikes boldly at the very foundation upon which the association is built—that young men are the best laborers for young men, and that as they are specially tempted, therefore they must have special labor put forth in their behalf. We cannot stand before the church on any other basis in my opinion.” McBurney’s fears, however, were not realized. Before many years the opposition just described entirely vanished.

In 1879, when the policy of the associations had become practically fixed, Mr. Moody, as the world’s famous evangelist, was invited to

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serve as president of the international convention held at Baltimore in that year. In this connection a secretaries' conference was held, at which Mr. Moody said: "It is not the work of the Young Men's Christian Association to invite evangelists. Let ministers and churches do that. If there are ten churches in a city, and they will not unite in an invitation to an evangelist, let it alone. The evangelist ought not to go, nor should the association have anything to do with it. The work of the secretary is too important for him to engage in anything but his distinctive work of reaching young men.

"I would recommend a gymnasium, classes, medical lectures, social receptions, music, and all unobjectionable agencies. These are for weekdays—we do not want simply evangelistic meetings. I have tried that system in association work and failed, so I gave up the secretaryship and became an evangelist. You cannot do both and succeed."

The decade from 1870 to 1880 practically settled the policy of the association.

This concentration upon work for young men was the fundamental source of the rapid expansion during the years from 1880 to the present time, and the adaptation of the association to railroad men, college students, and other classes of young men. McBurney remarked, in 1878, "Of late years not only special work for young men has received attention, but distinctive effort has been put forth in behalf of special classes of young men." McBurney was among the first, but not the first, to be interested in work among railroad men. In 1873 he did not favor giving

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this work, which had been begun but a year previously, by the Cleveland association, a topic at the international convention, but in 1874, with his hearty approval this work was given a place on the convention's program. With others he was earnest in enlisting the interest of Cornelius Vanderbilt in this work.

In 1876 Mr. Luther D. Wishard, an undergraduate of Princeton, wrote McBurney as to the feasibility of enlarging the work of the religious society among the students of that university, into a student Young Men's Christian Association. A number of student associations were already in existence, and McBurney strongly urged this course. McBurney was one of six members of the international committee present at the international convention, held at Louisville one year later, 1877, at which it was decided to inaugurate work among students as a department of the international committee's service, and to secure a traveling secretary. Both McBurney and Mr. Wishard attended the state convention of Indiana a few weeks later. Mr. Wishard says:\* "I had been nominated by the college conference at the Louisville convention to serve as college secretary of the international committee. McBurney asked me what my plan was for the extension of the college movement. I told him. He entered heartily into it, and agreed on his return to New York to lay the matter before the committee. He did so, and the result was that I was called to the college secretaryship in September. I shall always feel that his influence in that matter was

\*McBurney Memorial, page 97.



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more potent than that of anybody else, and that he therefore exerted a determining influence upon the course of my life work."

McBurney was also deeply interested in the conferences at Northfield, and frequently attended them. Mr. Morse says: "From the beginning, McBurney sympathized heartily with the college movement, and was the wise counselor of Mr. Wishard. His influence in the international committee was of great service to this department, and also to the colored, Indian, German, commercial travelers', physical, and educational departments."

Reference has already been made to McBurney's part in restoring relations between the Northern and Southern associations after the Civil War. This work began at a time when a large per cent of the support of the international committee was dependent on his solicitation. It was due to his efforts chiefly that money for the Southern tours in the early seventies was secured.

With the location of the international committee in New York, McBurney came to feel deeply the burden of the financial side of the committee's work. He saw clearly that if the supervisory agencies of the association were to prosper, they would require adequate means just as surely as the local city work. Although with the other leaders he was absorbed in New York with a building canvass, and in the efforts to secure local expenses, for several years he bore the largest share in raising funds for the general work. It became evident to him, how-



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ever, that some other plan would be necessary if the work was to develop.

During the business depression which followed 1873, the committee's finances were at low ebb. M. Weidensall says: "At the Dayton convention, 1874, the international committee was not paying us anything, and at the convention a very small amount was raised. I saw McBurney sitting at one side and crying outright. I asked him what was the matter. He said, 'There is so little money for this work.' I told him he need not be concerned about it, that we would go on, salary or no salary, but he was very much depressed by the small amount of money raised. It was under this pressure that Mr. Morse became responsible for the committee's finances." The budget at this time was about \$7,500 a year.

McBurney was broad minded, his spirit and sympathy were catholic, he delighted in the development and adaptation of the association to manifold phases of work. He brought to the sessions of the international committee the counsel and suggestions of a wise and experienced local secretary. He always kept in touch with the sentiment through the country. His constant attendance upon state and international conventions and the general secretaries' conferences gave his counsel intelligence and weight in these deliberations, and he was heard and trusted at the international conventions as the surest guide when important questions were under consideration.

With regard to the relations of the state and international supervisory agencies, Mc-

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Burney believed in the policy of comity which characterized this relationship during his long career. In writing, in March, 1889, to a friend, he says: "Since the international work is ordered by associations in convention assembled, and not by states or state organizations, the relation between the associations and the international work is a direct relation.

"The international work brought into life the state organizations, and the international convention has never recognized any intermediary between it and the local associations. This has ever been a fundamental principle in the association scheme in this country. . . . The relation of the international and of the state conventions, and of the international and state committees, is by no means mandatory; it is advisory, and that only. It is desirable that the most cordial relation should subsist between the local association and the state convention and state committee, and the international convention and the international committee. Nothing approaching a dictatorial attitude should be assumed by any of the parties."

In comparing his service in the New York City association and his service in the association cause at large, one cannot but feel that in his heart and thought the work was one. True, he was officially the secretary of the New York society. He was always faithful in the performance of the obligations which this entailed. But he was equally the secretary at large for the associations of the continent, and he faithfully performed this unsalaried service. In the New York secretaryship he discovered the

needs of young men and the methods by which these needs might be supplied. It was in the metropolitan field that his ideals of work for young men were developed. These ideals and convictions he advocated and fostered among the associations throughout the country. For the New York association, his service was supervisory and executive ; for the international work it was consultative and advisory. He saw clearly the relationships between different departments of the association ; he recognized the pre-eminence of the city work. He also tactfully fostered harmonious relations between different sections of the country, and was considerate of the position and recognition due the Canadian associations. He stood for the unity of the international work upon this continent.

## CHAPTER III

### MCBURNEY'S RELATION TO THE YOUNG MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION IN OTHER LANDS—IN EUROPE—IN FOREIGN MISSION LANDS

Intercommunication is characteristic of this cosmopolitan age. Formerly political, linguistic, or race barriers were enough to isolate religious movements, but the past century has witnessed a multiplication of ties binding different sections of the world together. The Young Men's Christian Association has been one of the earliest and most influential of these agencies. By its world conventions, its common platform, its uniformity of aim, its publications, and its intervisitation, it has united into one organization Christian young men of every evangelical creed in fifty different nations, speaking many different languages.

McBurney was deeply interested in the work in Europe, and also in the unevangelized lands. He exerted himself definitely to foster the association in both of these directions. In these efforts, he co-operated with Mr. Morse, and together they carried the type of association work which had developed in America to England, Continental Europe, and other lands.

McBurney's first world convention was at Amsterdam, in 1872. He was not present at Hamburg in 1875, but attended the six world's

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gatherings during the succeeding eighteen years—twice at London, and one each at Geneva, Berlin, Stockholm, and Amsterdam. In 1898 the only cable message sent by the conference assembled at Basle was an expression of sympathy and regard, forwarded to McBurney's bedside during his last sickness.

When McBurney entered the arena of European association affairs, the world's conferences had been for many years, in effect, administered from London—the parent association. Sir George Williams, the founder of the association movement, and William E. Shipton, the veteran secretary of the central association, were the leading figures in the British work. On the continent of Europe, the prominent men were Rev. Paul Cook of Paris, Max Perrot of Switzerland, and Dr. Krummacher and Anton Haasen of Elberfeld, Germany. None of the continental countries had a national organization. The Franco-Prussian War was just at an end, and the hostility between Germany and France was still bitter. What general administration of association affairs there was in Europe had fallen by mutual consent to the London association, and the secretary of this association, Mr. Shipton, conducted correspondence, published general reports, and arranged for the triennial conventions. In England there was a crude form of national organization by which the various associations were regarded as provincial branches of the parent society in London. This made Mr. Shipton national secretary for England. He practically combined the offices of world's secretary, national secretary, and local secretary

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in one. Mr. Shipton was a man of fine presence, good education, marked platform ability, and of great energy and intensity of purpose. He became secretary of the London association in 1850, twelve years before McBurney entered the New York work. He early grasped the idea of the specific mission of the association to young men, and the London association has never wavered in its devotion to the true work of the organization. His ideas of the secretaryship were different in some respect from those of McBurney, and he was led a number of times to take opposite views from the representatives of the American associations, but he and McBurney were warm friends from their first acquaintance, and remained so through life.

Mr. Morse and McBurney were both in Europe in the summer of 1872 on separate and private errands. McBurney was much in need of rest, and a purse had been made up voluntarily by Mr. Dodge and Mr. Jesup to enable him to go abroad. He and Mr. Morse arranged to meet at the Amsterdam convention. They went to their first world's conference practically ignorant as to European association affairs, and they had no hand in shaping matters on that occasion, but their eyes were opened to relationships as they really existed, and to the place of importance to which the American work was entitled. As Mr. Morse expressed it, "We discovered that the European associations were utterly behind us—wholly in the rear. We saw that we represented the largest and strongest group of associations in the whole assemblage, and that

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they were not adequately brought to the attention of the meeting."

Mr. Shipton was in practical control of the conference, and was not very friendly either to the American ideas of association work or to having America strongly represented. No paper had been assigned to the American group of associations. In this sentiment Mr. Shipton did not represent the British delegates. There were men of other minds from the north of England, and it was also evident that they were somewhat restless under the London secretary's control. The delegates from all countries were anxious to learn everything they could about the American work. The English delegates in particular held several conferences with McBurney and Mr. Morse, and learned with interest of the larger work in America.

At this convention, McBurney obtained from Mr. Shipton his conversational method of Bible class teaching. The European delegates were surprised that the Americans did not put more emphasis on Bible study. The Americans on their part were surprised to find an absence of the men's gospel meeting, without which they could not conceive of association work. McBurney induced Mr. Morse to lead an American prayer-meeting as an object lesson, but under the influence of the Bible class idea, some of those present created an argument in the prayer-meeting which quite destroyed its effect.

On this visit, and particularly at the convention, McBurney became acquainted with Sir George Williams. A most intimate friendship and respect sprang up between these two men.



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Mr. Williams, who had come as a farmer's boy to the great city to enter business life, had risen to affluence, but had never lost the deep spiritual zeal which had led him, as a dry goods clerk, to inaugurate the Young Men's Christian Association. He had never lost his interest in the movement, and had always made its prosperity his constant care. He labored unceasingly for its advancement, and as his wealth increased, he gave unsparingly to its development. As McBurney stands pre-eminent among the employed officers of the association, so George Williams, the founder of the association, is its most eminent volunteer worker. In zeal for personal work and love for young men, these two were akin. Williams, like H. Thane Miller, had great skill with an audience, and was an inspiring convention chairman. He had a popular way which took with the masses; he was emotional and most direct. He had a deep prayer life, and a simple, earnest, loving heart. He was alert, enterprising, and tireless. Without prejudice, he was willing to adopt new plans from any quarter. He had McBurney's interest in the individual, but not his foresight for the organization. Each man recognized the other's worth, and they labored side by side.

Previous to the Amsterdam convention, Mr. Shipton, with whom the New York association had been in frequent correspondence, had represented the Americans at the conventions; but after observing the convention at Amsterdam, Mr. Morse was unwilling to have the London secretary longer remain the only channel through which America should be represented. At

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Amsterdam each paper was presented in the language of the reader, and afterwards inadequately summarized by an interpreter. When the delegates returned to New York and related in the sessions of the international committee what they had seen, Mr. Brainerd said, "At the next conference we must have an American paper, on the American association work, and it must be printed and translated into the languages of the conference, with sufficient copies for distribution." This inaugurated a new practice at the world's conference. In 1875 two papers were prepared at the New York office, and translated into French, German, and Dutch. Several hundred copies were printed in each language and taken to Hamburg where the convention was to be held. There was also an assortment of American association publications, put together by Mr. Morse, and a year book for each delegate. McBurney did not attend this convention, America being represented by Mr. Morse and Mr. William F. Lee. For the first time in the history of the conferences each delegate was able to follow the speaker in his own language, with the result that a desire for discussion was created. The printed matter brought by the Americans was sought and carried wherever the association work had been developed. For the first time, the European associations learned that the American work was greater and more influential than that in any other land.

This opened the way to the developments at the succeeding conference at Geneva, in 1878, when the American influence was an important

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and guiding factor. When the time arrived for the Geneva conference, a party of forty American association leaders prepared to attend. At this convention not only the American paper but a number of others from England and France were printed and translated into the languages of the conference. One of these, by a French delegate, was on "International Ties," in which the establishment of a central permanent committee was advocated. It was held that the conference was too loosely organized and administered. The ideas of the writer were apparently suggested by the American reports submitted at the previous conference, and it was proposed to adopt some plan of organization similar to the American international committee, the only one then in existence. The plan, however, was an impossible one, as it proposed a central body which should be authoritative. No central supervising agency in the association could exist unless it recognized the independence of the local association. The Americans were keenly alive to this necessity, drawn from twenty-five years of experience.

It happened that the delegates were invited to hold one session of the conference at the country-seat of Adolphe Perrot. A storm arising, instead of holding the session in the open air, the delegates were crowded into the different rooms of the residence. McBurney was in one room with a group of the delegates, and Mr. Morse in another with a second group. The topic for discussion was a central organization. The two friends did not meet until nearly midnight at the hotel, when they were

interested to find that they had both independently worked out almost identical plans for a world's organization, after the model of the American international committee. The scheme involved the choosing of a world's committee with permanent headquarters, which should not be in England, but upon the continent of Europe, and which should have general supervision over Young Men's Christian Associations in all lands, both in the Old World and the New. The sentiment of the conference was strongly against a world's committee located in England, yet it could not be located either in France or Germany on account of the political hostility growing out of the recent war, and location in America would have been unsatisfactory to all. It was therefore proposed that the administration should have its headquarters at Geneva, Switzerland.

A number of the British delegates, led by Mr. Shipton, were strenuously opposed both to the suggested change in headquarters and organization. Mr. Shipton took the floor and spoke against the proposition. McBurney was greatly stirred on this occasion, so much so that he did not trust himself to reply, but persuaded Mr. Morse to advocate the proposed change. Not all of the English delegation stood with Mr. Shipton. The majority followed George Williams, who spoke in favor of organizing the world's work on the new basis. The plan was carried by an overwhelming majority. A world's committee was chosen with a quorum at Geneva, and representatives for each of the leading nations in the association movement. The com-

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mittee was inexperienced, and leaned much upon the Americans for advice and guidance. McBurney and Mr. Morse saw clearly that unless the proposed committee could have a properly qualified executive secretary to devote his whole time to its service, it would amount to little. A providential candidate appeared in the person of M. Charles Fermaud of Geneva, whom the conference had chosen to preside over its deliberations. He was a talented young man engaged in the banking business, of earnest spiritual life and exemplary habits. He spoke the three languages of the conference with fluency, and was most active in his interest in the association cause. Mr. Morse and McBurney agreed upon him as the man for the new service, and labored with all their zeal to induce an acceptance on his part. Finally, at a small conference, at which McBurney, Morse, George Williams, and Russell Sturgis of Boston, were present, it was agreed that if M. Fermaud was willing to accept as secretary, and would begin work January 1, 1879, George Williams would pledge £100 a year for England, and McBurney and Mr. Morse would be responsible for \$500 from America. They also extended an invitation to M. Fermaud to make a tour of the American associations, and to be present at the American convention which was to be held at Baltimore in the summer of 1879. Later M. Fermaud accepted the arduous service to which he was invited. Everything possible was done by both Mr. Morse and McBurney to make M. Fermaud's visit to America both profitable and pleasant. It was largely through this

visit that M. Fermaud gained a knowledge of the modern ideal of association work. At this time there was not a general secretary employed upon the continent of Europe, and his contact with McBurney, and study of the work in the building on Twenty-third Street in New York City, proved a moulding influence in his career.

The conference of 1881 met in London. At this conference, McBurney introduced into the world's gathering the program of procedure which he had originated for the American convention fifteen years before, and which in that connection was called the "backbone of the convention." When the report of the Geneva committee was presented at London, at McBurney's suggestion it was referred to a special committee for consideration. This special committee was instructed to study the report, and recommend to the convention a course of action based upon it for the coming three years. This became a standing committee of the convention, and McBurney became the constant and leading member of it. His presence upon this committee, with his superior knowledge and experience of active association affairs, gave him a place of practical leadership in the world's work. From the nature of its duties, this committee piloted the conference in its action. Mr. Morse said: "McBurney gave to the conference its leading executive committee, and he was the brains of that committee. He was invaluable in carrying the American method into the fiber of the world's conference."

What McBurney did in 1881, he repeated at Berlin in 1884, at Stockholm in 1888, at Amster-



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dam in 1891, and at London in 1894. In these conferences he performed the same function, and they more and more approached an American convention. This was the quiet, controlling work which McBurney enjoyed, and in which he showed forth his masterful spirit.

One of the results of the London conference in 1881 was that the British association leaders came to feel that they had outgrown the parental form of organization in London, which did not allow the local associations any voice in the general management. The north of England particularly was restless under this control. George Williams was anxious for some solution. McBurney suggested to him as a way out that a national committee be formed similar to the international committee in America, and helped devise a plan. Mr. Williams favored this, and such a committee was appointed.

McBurney, commenting upon the world's work in 1885, said in a report to the New York City association: "Decided progress has been made in well-directed efforts for young men by the European associations, especially in Great Britain and Germany. Persons occupying high social positions in those countries are now engaged in work for young men, with unexampled activity. This is due in some measure to the fact that the aggressive spirit of socialism has awakened Christian men of the so-called higher classes to a sense of their opportunity and responsibility. They see that the true antidote to an infidel, lawless socialism is to be found in a Christian socialism, manifested and practiced by the following of the example of Jesus Christ



in his self-denying ministry to men. This is a very hopeful feature in our European work."

McBurney's last attendance at a world's conference was the Jubilee convention at London in 1894. At this convention, George Williams was knighted by the Queen, and given the freedom of the city by the London Council. McBurney was honored among the most prominent American guests on this occasion.

A number of the European general secretaries visited America as the years went by, and learned much from McBurney and the New York work. Carl Fries, the secretary at Stockholm, says, "I owe much to Robert R. McBurney for his personal kindness and for the valuable instruction in association work which he gave me during my never-to-be-forgotten stay in America." Christian Phildius, for many years secretary at Berlin, and now one of the secretaries of the world's committee, was similarly influenced by McBurney.

In tracing the development of the European work, one cannot but see McBurney's master, guiding hand, and feel the potency of his influence. Mr. Morse says, "His service to the world's conferences was parallel to the service he rendered to the American conventions; he inserted the backbone into the work."

McBurney was not only interested in Europe but he also stood for foreign missionary work for young men on the part of the American international committee. His last service on the international committee was chiefly devoted to this cause. He believed in it thoroughly, and he entered into a sympathetic and fatherly

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relationship with the secretaries who went out into foreign lands. He was a pronounced believer in foreign missions, an interest which illustrates the catholicity of his sympathy. In connection with missionary effort in foreign lands, a number of Young Men's Christian Associations, chiefly in mission colleges, had gradually come into existence. In 1887 there were fifteen associations in Ceylon, six in India, five in China, four in Japan, eighteen in other parts of Asia, and twelve in Africa. These were chiefly student associations. They were small, and were without general secretaries, and with the exception of a hall belonging to the association at Osaka, Japan, without property.

A strong interest in general foreign missions had been awakened among the college students of America through the efforts of Mr. Wishard and others. This was seen at the convention in 1879 at Baltimore in the interest there expressed, and in the organizing of missionary committees on the part of students to study foreign missions and secure contributions. This interest culminated in the student conference at Mount Hermon in 1886, when one hundred students volunteered to go as foreign missionaries if the way should be opened.

At the second student gathering at Northfield in 1887, Rev. Jacob Chamberlain, D. D., who was in this country on a furlough from India, was present, and most earnestly contended that Young Men's Christian Associations were needed in the foreign field, and that the American international committee ought to send out general secretaries for this service. Dr.

Chamberlain laid this matter before McBurney, and deeply aroused his sympathy. At the same time, news came of opportunities in the government schools of Japan for American teachers, who might also be influential in missionary work. McBurney was much interested in this development, and encouraged Mr. John T. Swift, a graduate of Yale, who had been his assistant, to go to Japan as a teacher. Mr. Swift arrived in Japan on February twentieth, 1888, with an appointment as corresponding member of the American international committee. He immediately took steps to study the character of the associations then existing in different parts of the empire, and kept McBurney intimately acquainted with his progress. He was particularly impressed with the great opportunity at Tokio among the resident young men of that city, and among the large number of students gathered there at the Imperial University from every province of the empire.

In the mean time, Dr. Chamberlain had urged the foreign work upon McBurney and other members of the international committee. McBurney said to Dr. Chamberlain that it would not do to go forward without first consulting the missionaries and the secretaries of the mission boards of the various churches. Some of the committee did not think the missionary secretaries would favor the plan, and were unwilling to involve the international committee in any controversy. It was accordingly agreed that Dr. Chamberlain should return to India, and first arrange for an appeal to be sent to the American international committee from the

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missionaries on the field. He returned to India, and at a large conference of the missionaries of the Madras presidency, held on March twelfth, 1888, in an earnest address, presented reasons why the missionaries should unite in inviting the American Young Men's Christian Association to work for young men in foreign lands.\* "After full consideration of Dr. Chamberlain's statements, the conference unanimously resolved, 'That it will gratefully welcome such well-qualified, thoroughly trained agents as the Young Men's Christian Associations may propose to send, and will give them its cordial sympathy and co-operation.'" Meantime, the matter had been laid before the secretaries of several prominent mission boards, and received their hearty indorsement.

In 1888 Mr. Wishard started on a tour of the colleges and cities of mission lands. He says:† "McBurney, more than any other member of the committee, strongly believed in the foreign work, and encouraged me at every step of it." Upon the suggestion contained in a letter from Mr. Wishard, money was secured in New York to enable Mr. Swift to give his whole time to association work, though he was not as yet in official relation except as corresponding member to the American committee. Mr. Swift attended the international convention held at Philadelphia in 1889. At this convention two addresses were given upon work for young men in foreign lands, and so much interest in this cause was aroused that the following instructions were given to the

\* Year Book, 1889, page 42.

† McBurney Memorial, page 97.

international committee:\* “Resolved, That the international committee be empowered to establish such associations, and place such secretaries in the foreign mission field as in its judgment may be proper, and to receive such contributions for this work as associations or individuals may contribute to it.”

Immediately after the adjournment of this convention, McBurney, in a session of the international committee, moved the appointment of a committee on work for young men in the foreign field. McBurney became chairman of this committee. While a number were doubtful about the wisdom of inaugurating this work, he urged it with earnestness and deep conviction. In this he was seconded by Mr. Morse, who relates, “I was anxious to have the foreign work commenced, but the plan would not have been undertaken without Mr. McBurney.”

During the summer of 1889, McBurney framed a proposed policy for the work in unevangelized lands. This was sent to all members of the international committee, and finally after incorporating several amendments was adopted at a meeting of the committee September twenty-six, 1889. It was as follows:†

“1. The convention did not contemplate the sending out of general missionaries, and therefore any such course of procedure by the international committee, the state committees, or local associations is unauthorized.

“2. Where the way is open for association work in any nation, and a competent association

\* International report, 1899, page 70.

† Year Book, 1890, page 43.

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worker is ready to go, the committee will gladly send such worker, provided funds needed for the purpose of sending and maintaining him upon the foreign mission field are specially contributed—the treasurer of the committee being instructed to keep a separate account of such funds.

“3. The chief aim of such American representative upon the foreign mission field should be to train and develop native Christian young men in the principles and methods of the association work, and to plant native, self-sustaining Young Men's Christian Associations, rather than to lay the basis for the call and coming of American associates into that work.

“4. All the work of such American representatives should be carried on in harmony with, and in conformity to, the deliverances and instructions of the international conventions.

“5. The work of such representative should also be carried on, not only in harmony with the evangelical missionaries and pastors of churches on his field, and with the various foreign mission boards they represent, but most earnest effort must be made by him to secure their approval, sympathy, and co-operation.

“6. This American representative shall be known as secretary of the international committee for the field to which he is sent.

“7. While the international committee is the agent of the international convention, and is a medium for the transmission of such money as it may receive from associations and individuals for the support of these representatives on the foreign field, it cannot assume for the salary

and other expenses of these representatives a financial responsibility beyond the contributions offered and pledged in the manner alluded to, nor can such expenses be made a charge upon the committee's general treasury.

"8. Such representative shall report at least every month to the committee, and through it to the financial constituency sustaining their work.

"9. This work upon the foreign mission field shall be placed under the direction of a special subcommittee of the international committee."

By this policy the association strictly guards itself from being a pioneer in foreign mission work. It regards its province to be to follow the missionaries of the church, and to co-operate with them as they may desire. It is also arranged that the budget for the foreign work shall be entirely distinct from the home budget, so that there will be no confusion in the minds of contributors, and only such work is to be undertaken as is provided for in advance. A recognition of the dignity and importance of this work is the provision that the secretaries sent out are to be known as secretaries of the international committee. The rapid development of the foreign work during the past ten years has demonstrated McBurney's foresight, and is another illustration of his statesmanlike qualities. It is also interesting that it is the type of work for young men evolved in America, in which he had such influence in shaping, which the missionaries upon the foreign field have sought, and which is rapidly spreading throughout the world.

Only the choicest men have been chosen for



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this service. The second secretary to go out was David McConaughy, who left the large and influential work at Philadelphia to undertake the secretaryship at Madras, India. At the time of McBurney's death, there were two secretaries in Japan, four in India, one in Ceylon, one in Brazil, and four in China.

It is necessary here to record one of the most trying experiences in McBurney's life of service—his severance from the international committee which he had served faithfully for so many years. It is plain that he felt heavily at times the burden of the various lines of executive work which rested upon him. He first offered his resignation in September, 1892. In this letter of resignation he says: "Finding it necessary to be relieved of some part of the burden of association work, I have been considering my relations to the international committee. . . . The work of the committee in which perhaps I am most interested, the foreign mission work, will need closer and more careful supervision in the future than I can possibly give to it. I have always believed that the members should hold a close and direct relation to their subcommittee work, not merely assenting to the plans of the secretaries. . . . While having the fullest confidence in the self-devotion and zeal of every secretary of the committee, I believe it would be a peril to the association cause if the members of the subcommittees do not come into possession first-hand of all the details of the work, the supervision of which is committed to them."

This resignation, however, was not accepted,

and McBurney continued as a member of the committee. He, however, felt his growing infirmities. He had recently returned from his absence in Palestine, and speaking of this in a letter to a friend, he said: "I found it necessary to go away from New York, owing to impaired health, which came from overwork and insufficient exercise. I was confined to my room practically from the early part of November (1891) until the beginning of February (1892)."

Not only was McBurney feeling the pressure of overwork and bodily infirmity, but there was a growing apprehension in his mind as to the wisdom of the policy of expansion of the agencies of supervision. During the years following 1890 this expansion became more and more obvious. The budget of the international committee and the number of secretaries employed increased steadily. Two divergent theories were held: one, that the chief agencies of supervision ought to be the state committees, and the other, as McBurney described it, held that "The more state work is developed, the greater need there will be for international work." McBurney strongly opposed the latter view. He feared too much concentration and centralization in the hands of the international committee. He felt that the budget was becoming dangerously large. His own words regarding this were, "I believe that the committee has entered upon a career which will result in disaster sooner or later." He was also opposed to the plan of the field secretaryship, by which the country was divided into several dis-

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tricts and a resident secretary placed in charge of each.

Accordingly, in the summer of 1895, he renewed his resignation to the committee, and insisted upon it being accepted. It was with sincere regret that the committee assented to his request, on the nineteenth of September, 1895. The following minute, prepared by Mr. Richard C. Morse, was placed upon the records of the committee:

"As secretary of the New York association and one of its delegates, Mr. McBurney attended his first international convention in 1865, at Philadelphia. Owing to his successful exertions some discussion was accomplished in that convention of distinctive work for young men. It was quite an achievement upon what we would call right lines in those early days, when discussions were diverted to many subjects quite apart from distinctive work for young men.

"The following year, when the convention met at Albany, he was made chairman of the committee on executive (or international) committee's report. This committee, up to that time, had been itinerated from year to year, its last place of abode having been Philadelphia. He drafted and presented the resolution which was adopted locating the committee for three years in New York City, where it has since continued. It consisted at first of five members, all resident in New York City. Though not at that time chosen one of the five original members, Mr. McBurney was continued as corresponding member for the state of New York, and as such, in response to special invitation, he attended the meetings of the committee regularly from the beginning, and rendered specially valuable service during the first year of the committee's work. On the reappointment of the committee, three years later, by the convention at Portland (1869) he was elected one of its members, and has ever since been among the most faithful at all the sessions, keeping himself posted on all lines of the work.

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“In the early days he was the main reliance of the committee in the direction of the finances. In 1868 he secured, by his own personal solicitation, the money needed by the committee to put in the field its first agent, Mr. Robert Weidensall; and in the following year (1869), it was owing to his selection and solicitation that the committee secured its present general secretary. As the international work developed from year to year, it would be difficult to exaggerate Mr. McBurney's influence in the councils of the committee. He kept in touch with every new department. In the absence at any international convention of the chairman, Mr. McBurney was the member ready to represent the committee upon the floor in all critical emergencies. His unrecorded services in this line were simply invaluable. He was chosen president of the international convention at Dayton, in 1874, and declined to serve, as he was there on behalf of the international committee to present its report, and deemed that he could not properly act in both capacities.

“As the work grew money was needed, and it was he who began the securing of that constituency of donors in New York City, whose contributions have formed so large, stable, and indispensable a part of the committee's annual fund. The proportion of the whole fund contributed by New York in those early days of his solicitation was as great as at the present time.

“During the years of this influential connection with the international committee and convention, he was (1) general secretary of the New York City association, which he was helping to make the leading association of the country—a position it maintained steadily; and in the general secretaries' conference he was showing himself to be the leader of the general secretaries of the country; (2) he was also the prominent leader in the New York state convention and committee, during the earlier, formative period of its growth, when it began to take rank with the best state organizations and work in the country. He was therefore ever bringing to the councils of the committee the ripe experience gained in these departments of association work, and was an influential factor in enabling the committee to maintain that leadership in supervision and extension which has given it its

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strong and useful position in the scheme of our work for young men.

"It would seem appropriate here to record the fact that at the international convention at Albany, in 1866, it was Mr. McBurney who introduced not only the resolution locating the international committee at New York City, but another giving the committee authority to call state and provincial conventions, and to issue the call for the observance of the Week of Prayer in November, which has since become a world-wide observance.

"Previous to the adoption of the evangelical test at the Detroit and Portland conventions of 1868 and 1869, Mr. McBurney had already carried the adoption of that test at the New York state convention in 1867, and was able to throw his influence intelligently and most helpfully in favor of its adoption at the international meeting.

"More steadily and influentially than any other member he has represented the committee at the world's conferences on the other side of the Atlantic, attending every conference but one since the year 1872, and serving prominently on the committees of each conference.

"His leadership in the foreign work of the committee, from its very beginning, as permanent chairman of the foreign work committee, is one of his latest and best contributions to the international work.

"The committee accepts with great reluctance the resignation of Mr. McBurney, and places on its minutes this brief record of his long term of invaluable service, with the expression of its affectionate appreciation, and with the earnest prayer that his best and most fruitful years may be those that yet remain to complete and to crown his lifelong devotion in his Master's name to the welfare of young men both at home and abroad."

On behalf of the committee,

RICHARD C. MORSE,  
General Secretary.

Writing to one of his fellow secretaries, McBurney said later:

"The city work crowds me very much, and the international work was a heavy burden, heavier than any

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person out of New York City could appreciate, and for that reason it became necessary for me to resign. I had served the committee for twenty-nine years, and was entitled to be relieved."

But active men cannot give up service which is dear to them without many poignant and keen regrets. That McBurney felt the severance of this life-long relationship, there is abundant evidence. Writing to one of the secretaries in the foreign field, he said :

"My greatest regret in resigning from the committee is, that I am withdrawn from close relation to the foreign mission work. My sympathies are more deeply enlisted with you fellows that have gone to the front than with any other set of men that I have any knowledge of, either at home or abroad. I assure you it was hard to withdraw from that work, but I am quite sure that I have done right, though it has cost me a good deal."

McBurney accepted a position as a member of the advisory committee, and continued in this relation to the international work until his death. It is gratifying also to record that at the conference of the traveling secretaries of the international committee held in the fall of 1896, at which the plans of each department for the coming year were discussed, McBurney was present. He listened to the account of the work of each man, and at the close of the conference expressed his enthusiastic appreciation of the work that the committee was doing.

McBurney's interest in work for young men had gone through a steady evolution. At first he served the small organization of 151 members in New York City in 1862. From this he grew into sympathy and interest for all the

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tempted young men of the metropolis. Very rapidly his interest and sympathy went out to the young men of America, and we find him active in the international conventions. In the fullness of his powers when the Twenty-third Street building was completed, and he stood pre-eminent among the leaders for work for young men in America, we find him taking part in the conventions and advising with the leaders of the associations of Europe. Later he formulated the platform upon which the Young Men's Christian Associations have undertaken their work for young men in non-Christian lands. Thus was perfected the sublime service of a noble heart and a noble life.



## CHAPTER IV

### MCBURNEY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SECRETARYSHIP

#### THE SECRETARIES' CONFERENCE—THE TRAINING SCHOOL AT SPRINGFIELD

Of all the association movement has brought forth, the most vital contribution is the secretaryship. To this may be attributed its permanence and continued power. The church will never give up the idea of having specially prepared and qualified men set apart for direct work among young men. Prior to 1871, the Young Men's Christian Association was a movement under volunteer leadership. Since that time the employed officers have risen into a place of great influence. Of these McBurney was easily the chief. The period of volunteer leadership was marked by activity in evangelistic work for young men. The second period has seen the rise of a diversified work for the culture and development of Christian young manhood.

It has been said that Robert McBurney created the secretaryship. He has been called the "discoverer and demonstrator" of this office. In this he made his greatest contribution to the movement which he served, and to the world. He was the first to really give shape and character to the secretarial office. He was by no means the first salaried official in the

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association. A city missionary among young men was employed by the London association within six months of its origin. McBurney owed much to Mr. William E. Shipton who became secretary of the London society in 1850. A number of men were employed by the American associations before 1862, but it was McBurney who first developed the distinctive executive characteristics which make the secretaryship to-day. He became in a sense the personal embodiment of Young Men's Christian Association work. When he became secretary in New York, there were but three or four salaried officers in the American associations, and less than a dozen in the world. His experience, his forceful, genial, and tactful personality, his wide acquaintance, and his commanding position in New York City, made him the leader of the secretarial force, as it grew from this small group to a trained regiment of fourteen hundred men united in one brotherhood, and giving their lives to one cause. McBurney was looked up to as a father and teacher by this alert body of younger men. He took it upon himself to be concerned in all secretarial affairs. He was even charged with being a "boss" by those whose purposes ran counter to his own. Scores, and perhaps hundreds, of secretarial positions were filled upon his recommendation, and there are not a few occasions where he was instrumental in securing the removal of inefficient men.

McBurney's qualities as a friend and companion shine out in his relation to his fellow secretaries. He bore the difficulties and burdens of the many who came to him for advice.

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He was particularly sympathetic with the new and inexperienced men. He sought them out at conferences, and encouraged them whenever he had opportunity. There is no more beautiful example of fellowship in Jesus Christ than is to be found in the fraternity of the employed officers of the Young Men's Christian Association. Separated by distance, often standing alone in a community, facing new and untried problems, without experience, these men are drawn by an irresistible need to an intimate fellowship with one another. As St. Francis of Assisi, that beautiful character of the Middle Age, drew about himself the "little brothers" of St. Francis, and welded them into a mighty order, so McBurney drew to himself his brethren in the secretaryship, and created a new order adapted to the conditions of the modern church.

The first step in this development occurred following the international convention at Washington in 1871, when aboard a steamer sailing from the capital to Mount Vernon, a meeting was held of the salaried agents of the Young Men's Christian Association. Only twelve men were present. McBurney was called to the chair, and each man gave an account of his own duties in the association which he represented. Only one man bore the title of general secretary. These men organized "The Association of the General Secretaries of the Young Men's Christian Associations of the United States and British Provinces." This body, meeting annually through the rest of McBurney's life, and now bi-annually, became the first training

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school for employed officers in the association. To it came the leaders from year to year, and also the men who were under appointment to this office. McBurney was deeply interested in this conference. He gave to it his best thought and effort, and brought to it all the wealth of his experience. The building on Twenty-third Street became a rendezvous for the secretaries of the country. They turned to McBurney for advice, counsel, and training. He was unremitting in his attendance upon the conference of general secretaries, during its first twenty-seven years being absent only from the conferences at Racine in 1883, Montreal in 1884, and Oakland, California, in 1887.

At the second conference, in 1872, at Lowell, he earnestly urged that written papers be prepared in the future, and that there be an interchange of documents and frequent correspondence among the different secretaries. With this began the practice of arranging discussions at these conferences, opened by the reading of a paper prepared by some secretary. In the early days, some complained that they were not competent to write upon the subject given them. To such McBurney offered private interviews, out of which each came equipped with the material for the paper he was asked to read. Often papers came before the conference which would not have been written but for this personal influence. He was influential in preparing the programs for these gatherings.

McBurney has said of these conferences, "They became secretarial institutes, shaping,

defining, and perfecting the work of this responsible office." He himself contributed to the programs. In 1873, at Poughkeepsie, he read a paper on "The Relation of the Secretary to the Committees of the Association"; in 1878, at Buffalo, on "Association Lectures—Their Use and Abuse"; at Chicago, in 1880, on "The Relation of the Local Secretary to the International Work"; at New Haven, in 1882, on "Secretarialism a Snare in Association Work"; at Harrisburg, in 1886, on "The Branch and the Association—Their Relations"; at Nashville, in 1890, "How may we Overcome the Tendency to Spiritual Barrenness in the Paid Employee"; at St. Joseph, Mo., in 1891, "Bible Study in the Associations"; at Louisville, 1893, "Secretarialism"; and at Selma, Ala., in 1897, "The Weakness of the Religious Work of the Association." The attendance at these conventions rapidly enlarged. At Poughkeepsie, in 1873, thirty-one employed men were present; at Chicago, in 1880, 131 were present; at Grand Rapids, in 1888, 245 were present; at Cleveland, in 1896, 270 were present. These conferences possess no legislative power, and seldom pass resolutions. They are not open to the press, and give opportunity for confidential discussion and expression of opinion which is most helpful. It was in these gatherings that the fraternal, intimate relations which have bound the secretaries of different parts of the continent together were firmly cemented. These conferences were usually occasions of marked spiritual blessing.

Perhaps the most influential paper prepared

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by McBurney for the secretaries' conferences was the one on "Secretarialism a Snare in Association Work," read at New Haven, in 1882. McBurney's conception of the secretary was that it was his function to set the membership at work. He considered that success of a secretary was measured by the degree in which he developed men, and led the membership of the association out into active work for young men. This was the great message that he sought to carry to his fellow-secretaries. He did not look upon the salaried officer as being employed to do the work of the association himself, but rather as a leader who was to win, to incite, to train, and to direct others. He was not to be the man before the public, but the inspirer and pilot; a conspicuous secretary he considered a menace to the cause. In this paper he said, "Some associations have been secretarialized (a term coined by McBurney) into a state of absolute inefficiency." By secretarialism he stated that he meant "the taking by the secretary of an undue part, place, and prominence in the association. The true secretary will ever keep in mind that his duty is to keep the directors and members in the foreground and himself in the background. Where the secretary does not do this, he dwarfs the membership, makes it inefficient, and minimizes the association. The general secretary should seek to make himself a training officer. He should train the young men of his association to be winners of souls, and the members of committees to assume responsibility for the administration of the affairs committed to them in

a thoroughly systematic and business-like manner. He should so train his working force that if he is removed the work will go on systematically and effectively. The secretary is strongly tempted to neglect this, owing to his own familiarity with the work—the knowledge that he can do it better than a young man less familiar with it, and possessing less ability than himself. Some secretaries, forgetting that they should be training officers, do a vast amount of work themselves, and so rob the committees and other officers of responsibility for the very service with which they are charged. I am acquainted with an association where every religious meeting is conducted by a paid official, save one meeting that has a permanent leader. The secretary and the board of directors commend this course on the plea that better results are secured. If this course were followed by associations generally, I do not hesitate to say that the associations would become a curse rather than a blessing."

McBurney's ideal of the secretaryship stood in direct contrast with that represented by William E. Shipton, the secretary of the London association, who was his contemporary. In 1856 Mr. Shipton wrote in a letter to an American friend: "Here we have not, as with you, committees for discharging all special duties in connection with the work. Our committees are simply consultative. The secretary of the society conducts its meetings, arranges its public lectures, keeps minutes and accounts, solicits and disburses its funds, conducts all of its correspondence, receives young men for private religious interviews,



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teaches classes and delivers lectures to our own or branch associations, and daily at the office superintends the reading-rooms, receives visitors to the association, and supplies information as to its proceedings, meets the representatives of branch or kindred associations, and as far as opportunity permits, uses hospitality towards them." McBurney was directly opposed to this conception.

He was as watchful as a father over his fellow-secretaries. He encouraged them, and when he thought they needed it, he reproved them. He also studied the development of this office. He particularly felt that frequent changes on the part of the men were a serious evil. Writing, in 1893, he said: "I believe it is a decided disadvantage to secretaries and to associations to have secretaries change their positions. There is a certain restiveness among secretaries that is beginning to give business men the impression that they are in the work for what they receive more than for what they can do. This has been intensified in some quarters by the fact that secretaries, after acquiring an acquaintance and influence in the association, have resigned their office to enter business, and thereafter have taken little if any interest in the welfare of associations in towns in which they have settled. . . . Secretaries have need to keep in mind that their place is a place of service."

McBurney was also insistent upon his associates keeping the spiritual side of the work pre-eminent. In a letter written in 1897, he says: "The secretary of the association is upon a hill, and has even greater responsibilities rest-

ing upon him, in some respects at least, than almost any other man in the community. . . . He is responsible to the association and to the community for the reaching of young men. He may have a model educational work, a good physical department, large meetings, and a thorough social atmosphere, but if he has not a band of workers who are personally reaching young men and winning them from sin to righteousness, from the world to the church of Jesus Christ, he is not fulfilling his responsibility."

It is also interesting to note that McBurney regarded the local secretaryship as the most important office in association work.

There is no doubt that McBurney recognized his own leadership, and while he was an extremely modest man, he felt keenly any loss of prestige. One of the marked disappointments of his life came in connection with the secretaries' conference at Harrisburg in 1886. The New York association had become active in the propagation of the White Cross League, and had established a large branch of the White Cross Army. McBurney believed in this movement, and was desirous of seeing it adopted by the associations, feeling that it would be a helpful agency. The subject of the White Cross Army arose incidentally. In the discussions at Harrisburg, a severe attack was made upon the procedure in New York by a number of those at the conference, who held that, instead of opposing specific sins, it was the province of the association to get to the root of the matter by seeking a change of character in men through salvation in Jesus Christ. McBurney was thor-

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oughly aroused, and made one of his most notable speeches. He was opposed by I. E. Brown of Illinois, Robert Orr of Pittsburg, and W. E. Lewis of Wisconsin. He was grieved over the apparent reproach that the New York association was being satisfied with something less than the salvation of young men. He urged that, while the association should seek earnestly to win young men, it should not neglect the aid which the White Cross movement could give it. He was, however, voted down, and a resolution was passed as follows: "Resolved, That, while we recognize the great necessity there is for persistent effort to promote personal purity among young men, we deem it unwise and contrary to the well-established principles formulated for the guidance of our associations by the international convention, for the associations as such to adopt the methods of the White Cross Army and similar societies; and that, while we sympathize with all efforts for the improvement of the moral condition of men, we are still of the opinion that it is unadvisable for the associations to engage in any organized efforts for moral reform. But we recommend that through the approved agencies of the association more systematic and earnest effort be made in the physical departments to discourage impurity of every form, and to lead men to Jesus Christ, the savior from sin." This debate had come up incidentally, and McBurney felt called upon to defend the action of the New York association. One of McBurney's friends, now an influential secretary, said afterwards, "I was much incensed at the treatment he received upon the floor." He

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was himself profoundly cast down by the result. A friend said later that tears came to his eyes in referring to this incident, and that he spoke as though his child had left him, and no longer looked to him for guidance.

At the secretaries' conference at Selma, Ala., in 1897, McBurney's associates took the opportunity to recognize the completion of his thirty-five years of service by a complimentary address, and the passing of the following resolution, which shows the warm esteem in which he was held by his fellow-workers:

“With thanksgiving to Almighty God, the Young Men's Christian Associations of North America take note of the completion of thirty-five years of continuous and devoted service of Robert R. McBurney as general secretary of the New York Young Men's Christian Association, and the attainment to sixty years in the prime of his strength and in the vigor of his service.

“As members of this association of general secretaries and co-laborers with him in Christian work for young men, we desire to extend to our brother sincere congratulations upon this honorable attainment, and to assure him of the sincere love and hearty appreciation which we have for the service which he has rendered in the advancement of the movement, the life work in which we are engaged, and upon which he entered from the ranks of the active membership a generation ago.

“Without lessening the appreciation we hold for the service of other men to this organization, we would recognize the noble service our senior secretary has rendered in defining the character and work of a general secretary and in shaping the policy of the general secretaries' association.

“We would acknowledge the value of the inspiration and guidance he has given us during the years in which we have been associated with him.

“By the integrity of his life; by the great-hearted love and tenderness of his relations with us; by the frankness with which he has dealt with our faults as he

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has seen them; by his loyalty to and love for the Word of God; by his devotion to the principles which have characterized the association; by his indomitable persistency of purpose; by his manhood; by his gentlemanliness; by his sympathy; by his self-forgetfulness, his hope, faith, and prayerfulness, he has rendered us all a personal service, and shown us an example of Christian manhood which we desire to acknowledge with deep gratitude. We pray that our brother may fill to the full a half-century of service with us in working with Jesus Christ to advance His Kingdom among the young men of the world."

McBurney was deeply interested in the development of both the secretaryship and the physical directorship. He saw keenly the need of properly qualified men for these offices. Late in 1884, Rev. David Allen Reed of Springfield, Mass., came to New York to consult with Richard Morse, Erskine Uhl, and McBurney about the feasibility of establishing a secretarial department in connection with the proposed school for Christian workers at Springfield. These men entered heartily into this proposition. McBurney consented to become one of the incorporators, and to do his utmost in securing funds and students for the institution. The school organized early in 1885, but as yet had secured no instructor for the secretarial course. Among others, Mr. Reed applied to McBurney to suggest a suitable man. Together they went over the list of all the employed secretaries in the United States and Canada, and came to the conclusion that the most desirable man was Mr. J. T. Bowne, who had already, as secretary at Newburg, trained a large number of men for this service, and who was then employed as a secretary of the international committee, with

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special reference to securing secretaries and physical directors. Mr. Bowne hesitated to take up this task under the impression that he could accomplish more in the New York office of the international committee. An unavailing effort was made to find some other person, and finally, after earnest solicitation by McBurney, Mr. Bowne consented to undertake the work. McBurney was a faithful and devoted member of the board of trustees of the training school. His counsel was sought when the association department was established as a separate institution, in 1890. It is significant of McBurney's conviction of the importance of the secretariate, and the place of the training school in the association's development, that in disposing of his estate, he provided that one-fourth should go to the international training school at Springfield. He had not devoted himself to the accumulation of property, but a maturing life insurance policy had enabled him to purchase certain lots, which at his death, with other effects, were valued at \$10,000. He was a trustee of the school at the time of his death.

The tower room in the Twenty-third Street building, in which McBurney lived, was the home spot for every employed association officer however humble. Here were the births of new purposes, and the consecrations of many earnest lives to the winning of young men to Jesus Christ.

As the creator of the secretaryship, McBurney made his largest contribution to the problems of modern religious life, and it is in the hearts of his associates in this service that his memory will longest be enshrined.

## CHAPTER V

### McBURNEY'S LAST DAYS

McBurney's last work was in the capacity of general secretary directly in charge of a single association. It was the same field in which he had begun his association career. In September, 1897, when he was sixty years of age, by force of circumstances he was obliged temporarily to assume the secretaryship of the branch on Twenty-third Street in addition to his heavy duties as metropolitan secretary. For some time the branch had been without a man in charge. There was great difficulty in finding the right secretary, and until a man could be secured, McBurney determined, with his usual devotion, to assume charge of the work himself. This was an unfortunate decision; and yet his love for the work in that particular branch doubtless led him to be over-anxious for its success. The strain of constant, absorbing, self-consuming endeavor, added to some increasing bodily infirmities, was telling upon his strength, but he loved the old building, and for some time he gave strenuous attention to the details of its work. The result of this special application imposed upon an overtaxed frame was his enforced absence from the anniversary meeting in January, 1898, the first anniversary which he had missed since entering upon the work in 1862. It was also the first time since 1870 that the an-



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nual report of the New York work was prepared by a hand other than his own. He was sent for restoration to Atlantic City. His ailment grew in its complication, and in February, 1898, he went out to the Presbyterian Hospital of New York City for treatment. Here his friends ministered to him with the most loving devotion, one providing for him one of the pleasantest rooms in the hospital. In April resort was had to a severe surgical operation, but the best attainments of medical science could not give relief. He was taken for a month to the Adirondacks, and in September to the Sanitarium at Clifton Springs. Here he lingered for some months, alternating between improvement and decline, and suffering severely from multiple sarcoma. Though his body wasted, he kept his mind alert and interested in the affairs of the association, reading about its work and inquiring eagerly of the secretaries who came to his sick-room to visit him. Mr. Clarence J. Hicks, one of the international secretaries, was at that time living at Clifton Springs and saw him frequently, as did also his old friends George A. Hall, Richard C. Morse, and others.

As he had been incapacitated for service for a good many months, he felt it his duty to resign as secretary of the New York associations, and accordingly in the month of October sent in his resignation. This the board promptly and tenderly declined, extending him a leave of absence until the following February. Mr. Cleveland H. Dodge, president of the association, to whom the resignation was sent, wrote on October sixteen, 1898: "You cannot break off

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the ties of thirty-six years quite as easily as all that, and if you think we are going to give up our general secretary as long as there is any breath in his body, you are very much mistaken. What is more, we expect you back before many months have passed. . . . We need you and your ripe experience more now than ever, and you must brace up and get well (if only fairly well) for my sake if for no other, who have always leaned on you. One thing more: if you ever even breathe to yourself the thought that you may ever become a burden to those who would give all that they have for you, and if you ever again think of resigning, you will break all our hearts. . . . Richard Morse is to see you Wednesday, and will carry you the news of how offended we all are, although we love you and reverence you beyond all words to express. God bless you, and give you new strength and courage."

On November seventeenth, McBurney wrote to the office: "My rheumatism is less troublesome, and I am expecting before the winter is over to be at the office once more." On the twenty-ninth he wrote: "The doctor says I am making progress towards recovery, but it is not as apparent to me as to him. The rheumatism seems to hold on with remarkable tenacity, but I am patiently trusting that God may graciously rebuke the disease."

As the knowledge of his illness spread throughout the association world, he received multitudes of letters from fellow-workers. These are full of sympathy and prayer for his recovery, and grateful recognition of his life of

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service. On December seventh, three weeks before his death, he wrote: "Last night was the best night I have had since coming to the sanitarium, and though not out of the woods yet, I feel very much like whistling this morning. I certainly have reason to be thankful to my Heavenly Father for exemption from pain last night."

When it became certain that he must pass away, he was told that the end was not far off. He received the announcement calmly, but with some surprise. On December twenty-seventh, he said to his attendant in the morning, "Almost home." In the afternoon the end came quietly and peacefully.

The cheerful patience and sweetness of temper which characterized him through this illness deeply impressed all who were about him.

The funeral services were held on Thursday, December twenty-ninth, in the association hall of the Twenty-third Street building, the building which had been home to him for so many years. This was in keeping with his own wish. The pastor of his church, St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal, Rev. George P. Eckmann, presided; his close friend, President M. W. Stryker of Hamilton College participated; and a tender and devout appreciation was spoken by Bishop Henry C. Potter of the Protestant Episcopal Church, who had been an intimate friend of McBurney. A large number of secretaries of local associations and of the state and international committees occupied seats at the right of the platform. At the left were the employed officers of the New York association. In the

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center were the directors of the various New York branches and several members of the international committee, among them William E. Dodge, Cephas Brainerd, Lucien C. Warner, James Stokes, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and Morris K. Jesup.

Bishop Potter said: \*

“It is in such a presence as this that we readjust our standards of values. There is much in all our modern life, and especially in the life of cities, to confuse them. Externalisms—the proportions and the triumphs of the visible—create even in more serious minds an undue estimate of their value and meaning; and the type of man whose achievements are expressed by bulk and bigness, whether of structures, combinations, or accumulations, is the type to which there is apt to be paid the largest and the loudest homage.

“It is only when one of another type—one to whom externalisms have been all along consistently indifferent, who has owned little, built little, accumulated little—if, in the material sense, anything at all—it is only when such an one is taken from his place and work in life, and we suddenly realize how much is gone out of the world in his departure, that we readjust our point of view. There have been rich men, potential men in their influences upon the street or the market—men whose presence made weaker men tremble for the interests which their cleverness and their combinations daily threatened—who have died and vanished without a sign of grief or loss from the great world that they seemed to have so mightily influenced, and often with only a sigh of relief that cleverness, adroitness, powers of forecast and combination, without any fine scruple to restrain them, have been taken out of this world.

“What a different sentiment is that which gathers this various and widely representative assemblage to-day! As I look down into your faces, the gray heads dotting soberly the larger assemblage of younger heads and faces, the spectacle is profoundly significant. Some of you

\*McBurney Memorial.

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were the contemporaries of McBurney. Some of you have known him and worked with him during all the years of his connection with the Young Men's Christian Association. In all sorts of spiritual weather, in dark days as well as bright, in grave crises as well as in prosperous and peaceful seasons, you have wrought with him, prayed with him, known him through and through. And not only are you in no doubt about him to-day—not only have you never been in any doubt about him—but more than this, as you stand about his coffin, as little are you in any doubt about that supreme fact for which so steadfastly and consistently he stood—the fact of Jesus Christ, his spiritual sovereignty, and the incomparable preciousness of fellowship with him, and service for him. The air clears, the dust of human strifes and rivalries lifts and rolls away. The things seen and temporal shrink to their true and insignificant proportions; and in the presence of this noble manhood, translated now to worthier spheres, and as we rejoice to believe, to still larger opportunities, we measure by what our friend was and did the world and all that is in it at their real value.

“I am not here to eulogize him. With your knowledge of him and his work, that would be superfluous, if not impertinent. He did not need interpreting. He was utterly and absolutely transparent, and the chief charm of his character, next to its singular and beautiful modesty, was its unreserved, though always kindly, directness and candor. But though he himself least of all could wish me to spend these moments in personal praise, it is our privilege—yours and mine—to recall him as he was, and to give thanks for qualities so fine and high, and best of all, so absolutely consecrated.

“In their development it is impossible not to recognize those converging forces which are a part of God's providential ordering in making men, and in fitting them for their work. Once, in his company, it came out incidentally that he was a Methodist, and I said, ‘McBurney, I have always credited you with being a Scotch Presbyterian. Surely ‘thy speech bewrayeth thee.’ Thou art a Calvinist and a Scotchman.’ ‘No,’ he answered, smilingly, ‘I am neither. I am Irish by race, and by fellowship a Methodist.’ It let in a flood of light upon

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characteristics in him which are rarely combined, and still more rarely in such happy proportions. A mutual friend told me yesterday that Dr. Hodge of Princeton once looked in upon him as he was teaching a Bible class, and after listening a few moments, said, as he came away, 'McBurney is a Calvinist, though he don't know it.' He had been speaking of God's great purpose for man—a purpose not to be baffled or defeated by man's waywardness or perverseness, however extreme. In that sense I hope we are all Calvinists, holding fast, amid human failures, to the divine in man, which shall at last triumph over all sin and wrong. And we can imagine McBurney talking to a company of young men, and pleading with them to own their nobler destiny, and not to fight against the constraining love of Jesus Christ. For, after all, that was the dominant spring with him, as was natural in the fellowship to which he belonged. I shall not misjudge them, I think, if I say that the dominant note in the theology of our Methodist brethren is a note of hope. And this was a pre-eminent note in the work and ministry of our brother departed.

"I call it a ministry, and I do so advisedly, for no theory of the ministry can leave out of account the apostle's definition: 'As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.' No one who knew him can doubt that he had received the gift—the highest and best—of the Holy Ghost; and dear Dr. Howard Crosby, when McBurney was presented on his fiftieth birthday with a purse of gold pieces, only spoke the truth when he said, 'I know of no pastor of any church in this city whose ministry has been so useful and extended as the ministry of McBurney.' How wide-reaching it was, how gentle, how courageous, how enduring in its influence! One stops to think of all the young men that have passed under his hand, and have been moved and ennobled by his touch. Where are they to-day? Scattered far and wide, all 'round the world, in various callings and communities, but still carrying with them, I venture to think, the impress of that affectionate interest and wise counsel and unwearied watchfulness which once they experienced at his hands. What words



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of courage he has spoken! What lessons of loyalty, and purity, and fidelity to their divine Master he has urged upon disheartened, and lonely, and tempted ones! What new faith in themselves and in God he has awakened in them, and what hosts of young men and of older men there are to-day who have come to believe in the fatherhood of God, because, first of all, they learned to believe in the brotherhood of Robert McBurney!

"And now we are to bear him to his rest. Fitly above his breast there lies yonder wreath of orchids, with their chastened hues, so like his simple and modest manhood; and still more fitly rest there those pure white roses, like his own unstained and blameless self. True knight of God, well done! Thou goest—who of us can doubt it?—to larger tasks even as to nobler fellowships. Be ours to follow thee, as thou hast followed Christ!"

Through McBurney's efforts, the association had come into possession of a lot for stranger young men in Woodlawn cemetery, to which he had given the name "Place of Rest." Here, as he himself wished, he was buried, the body being borne to Woodlawn in a special car provided by the New York Central Railroad.

McBurney had asked for the greatest simplicity in whatever services might be held, but when he was assured that there would certainly be a memorial service, he made request in his will that on such occasion there be only congregational singing, that Mr. William E. Dodge preside, and that Richard C. Morse, William W. Hoppin, and Cephas Brainerd be invited "to speak to young men regarding fidelity to the association and personal work for leading men to the Saviour." He wished such a service to be only in the nature of an inspiration; and such it was. This man, who died without wife or child or close relative, was mourned by mul-



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titudes in his adopted city, and by the association fraternity throughout the world.

A large company assembled at the memorial service, and the addresses were the testimonies of devoted love. Resolutions from the New York association were presented by the Hon. Elihu Root, and a committee was appointed to provide a suitable memorial.

The committee proposed:

“First, the complete removal of the floating indebtedness upon the West Side Association Building, amounting to \$77,500.

“During the last years of his life, Mr. McBurney was absorbingly occupied in promoting the erection and equipment of the association building of the West Side Branch. In itself an embodiment of all that was wisest and best in the work for young men which he had been accomplishing during the many years of his active connection with the association, this building, with its admirable equipment, stands as the most fitting memorial of his life work. His deepest solicitude at the time he was taken ill related to removing the floating indebtedness on the building.

“Second, the placing in a prominent place in that building of a memorial tablet bearing the name of Mr. McBurney, and a simple inscription concerning his relation to that building and to the work of the association for which it stands.

“Third, the erection upon the association lot in Woodlawn of a simple and appropriate monument bearing his name.

“Fourth, the preparation of a memorial volume.”

To accomplish the objects named, the sum of \$81,000 was secured, and the debt on the West Side building removed, and a bronze bas-relief of McBurney placed in the reading-room. An able and fitting tribute was prepared by his life-long friend Richard C. Morse, which was

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published with the addresses delivered at the memorial service.

A final and significant memorial service was held on the afternoon of April nineteen, 1899. This was a gathering of intimate fellow-workers in the association from different fields of the service, to talk together about their departed leader. Each one told the others of his own intimate contact with McBurney, and in that informal, confidential conference the inner personality of the man was illuminated more brightly than it could have been in a systematic presentation on a formal occasion. These affectionate individual testimonies throw side lights on McBurney's personal characteristics. They reveal to us the secret of his dominating influence over men in his abiding love for Jesus Christ and his fellow-men. It was through his love for others and his devotion to the cause which enabled him to lay hold on men and make them work for the association. This is the fundamental impression created by a study of his life.

The participants at this gathering were Richard C. Morse, Robert Weidensall, T. K. Cree, H. P. Andersen, John Glover, Erskine Uhl, H. O. Williams, H. S. Ninde, and Dr. Luther Gulick of the international secretarial force; L. L. Doggett and J. T. Bowne of the international training school; G. A. Hall, state secretary of New York; Edwin F. See of Brooklyn; George A. Warburton, H. D. Dickson, F. G. Banister, and Henry M. Orne of New York City; and J. B. Griggs of Pittsburg. Mr. Orne, McBurney's successor, united with Mr. Morse in calling this

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gathering. Only employed officers in the association were present.

Letters were read from many who were unable to attend. The meeting was held in the tower room of the Twenty-third Street building, for twenty-five years the home of him whose life and work these friends had gathered to commemorate. Not a man was present who had not met the occupant alone in that chamber. Its curios, its pictures, its furniture, and its books, all its arrangement, spoke eloquently of McBurney.

The reminiscences given by these men, some of which are here related, show McBurney in daily contact with his friends. They show him strong, yet loving; sometimes overbearing, yet always in the end considerate of the feelings of others.

Mr. Morse said:

"I took the room below, and then we came together in the closest relations we had ever had. I helped him and he helped me in every possible way. Eugene Peck came into the work as his assistant, and after him Henry Webster. We were all together, aware of course, of one another's failings as well as of one another's excellencies. We got along very happily. We knew nothing else, day or night, meal time and sleeping time, but the association work. It was an illustration of concentration, upon which I look back with enjoyment, but would not expect any one else to quite reproduce in his relation to the association. Everything was new; we were treading untried paths. No one had preceded us in the offices that we held and in the work we were trying to do; we did not live anything else or think anything else.

"I would leave my office to go to lunch or dinner with McBurney. He had this man to see and that man, and it averaged from fifteen to twenty-five minutes each time before I could get him away from his office. We

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never thought of separating; it was essential that we should be together.

“When I went off as visiting international secretary on trips to conventions or other associations, I cannot tell you what a comfort it was to get back to this building! Coming from all sorts of associations, with apprehensions about the permanency of the work, I reached this place to find an actual building and a work going on which was an inspiration and a help. McBurney’s sympathies were of the very broadest. He entered into all the plans, all the association situations, that I described, and all the problems; how should this man be dealt with? How should that association be handled? He was as interested in it all as a girl in a love story, and was full of sympathy.

“When, in 1874, the burden of raising the funds for the international work, which had previously been carried by him, fell to me, he helped me in bearing it. He had solicited money especially from New York City donors, and he introduced me to these men. I remember we would call together and secure funds for this work.

“When the New York state work was to be organized, he began it and directed it. We went to the state conventions together.”

Mr. Morse added:

“I was chairman of the religious meetings committee of the New York City association. We had several meetings each week, and finally started the Sunday night tea. The example came from London. Then McBurney concluded to take a Bible class. The gradual growth of this class for young men was a very interesting feature of the development of this building.”

Robert Weidensall, the first employed agent of the international committee, said:

“McBurney made the motion at the international convention at Detroit, in 1868, that led to my appointment. He raised about one thousand dollars, and five hundred dollars was raised in Omaha for this purpose. The first state convention at which we met was at Janesville, Wisconsin. Here we worked side by side, and laid



THE TOWER ROOM.



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the foundation of the work in that state. All our plans worked together in great harmony.

"I remember coming once to this room on a cold night. I was wearing a summer overcoat. He brought out his overcoat and said, 'Here, you take this and put it on.'

"We met frequently as the years went by. I remember particularly the Colorado convention, where we stood together, facing a number of questions which were brought before that gathering, but which had no place in an association convention. We met them one by one and threw them out.

"He was called of God to this city for a special purpose. He came at an opportune time. There were few men then who had the right idea of the association, but he grasped the idea and it became part of his makeup. He devoted his life to it. In view of all, I regard him as a great man, the man who more than any other developed the city association idea.

"He dominated everything of which he took hold on account of his very nature as a leader, as Moody and Brainerd have dominated in their work. I have seen him again and again when business men were together, and I have seen him dominate them always. At the time I did not like it, but now I can see that God used him as he used Luther and so many others. He led, not for himself, but for the association, and because he believed the cause demanded it. He took hold of new things very slowly. He was conservative in all that concerned the association and the church."

George A. Hall, who through McBurney's influence was early called to the state secretaryship of New York state, said:

"I cannot really remember when I first met McBurney. We were boys here in New York together. He went to the Mulberry Street Methodist Church, which was a real old orthodox church, and I attended the Jane Street Methodist Church, which was one of the more evangelistic kind. McBurney liked to come over to our church. We had a band of about forty young fellows, all active,



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and he told me that he knew me from these visits long before I was acquainted with him. Later I entered the Methodist ministry, and in 1866 became a pastor in Brooklyn. I became better acquainted with McBurney, and occasionally led meetings at his request. In 1868, when there were but four general secretaries in the country, I was invited to become secretary of the association at Washington. I advised with McBurney, and decided to accept. I remember he did not like Moody's way of doing association work, and he thought I was inclined to the same method. He was very different from my idea of what a secretary ought to be then, and we did not agree very well. We corresponded and visited back and forth. He thought I was running things on too high a pressure, with mass meetings and various kinds of street meetings, and then bringing everybody into the association building. We had many discussions, but at that time did not see together. I used to feel that he was the 'kid glove' secretary, and that I was the secretary of the common people.

"McBurney was deeply interested in the revival of the Southern work, and recommended the first Southern tour which I took. He secured the money for this tour. We wrote him from each point at which we stopped. He even approved of the evangelistic part of it, believing that was the only way to begin in the conditions then prevailing in the South.

"At the recommendation of Moody, I was appointed to be secretary of the Brooklyn association, and then upon McBurney's recommendation I became state secretary of New York.

"My closest connection with McBurney began in 1876 and continued until his death. The best time to see him was in the morning. I found it a good plan to come to this room—not too early—and wake him up. While he was dressing his mind was free and he could advise. Sometimes he would storm away about the foolhardiness of certain people, and yet it would end with his sitting down, taking up his little Bible to read his lesson, and praying for these very men about whom he had been storming.

"I remember one day we were going out to lunch

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together with some unopened mail. He opened a letter and began reading aloud until he came to this sentence, 'You know you are obstinate.' He stopped and looked at me. I said, 'Well, Robert, some people think you are obstinate, but you know it is not so,' and I burst out laughing. 'What are you laughing at?' he asked. 'Why because that man lies so. You have a will of your own, that's all!'

Thomas K. Cree said:

"At the Richmond convention, in 1875, Robert came to me and said, 'The New England brethren want to make a Massachusetts man chairman of this convention, and it will never do for a New England Yankee to hold that position here.' We decided that Major Hardie was the man for the place. Now, so far as I know, there was not a soul in that convention who had heard of Hardie before, except Hall, McBurney, and myself, but he was made president of the convention. The Lord's hand was in it as well as McBurney's, though McBurney's was the one that did the business."

Mr. J. T. Bowne said:

"It was very largely through a consecration meeting led by Mr. Hall, in which he raised the question, 'Who is willing to consecrate his service this day to the Lord?' that I gave myself to Him for whatever he would have me do. I went away from the meeting with that thought in my mind. In February, 1877, my business engagement with my father ended, and I told him that I could not go on. I gave up my work, came to New York on Monday morning, and called on McBurney in this building. He greeted me very warmly as I came in, but as you have sometimes seen him do, he went on with his writing while I went on to tell my story. I said, 'I have come to inquire what I had better do to prepare myself for the secretaryship.' He asked, 'You have not given up your business, have you?' When I replied that I had, he said, 'Well, you are a fool.' But when we had talked further, no man could have been more cordial than he. He proposed to me first to spend some time at the Bowery

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branch. The secretary asked me to lead the meeting on Sunday, and just about time for the meeting to begin, in came McBurney with three or four men. They took places on the front seat like a school committee, and confused me very much. The fact of his appearance at this meeting leads me strongly to suspect that he had prompted the secretary to have me take charge in order that he might form an opinion of me. At the close he came to me and asked, 'Why do you get down on your knees when you pray? It would be better to look around and see what the rest of the audience do.' I spent some two months studying various associations, and was then called to Hudson, New York. McBurney expressed a warm interest in my success. Most of my interviews with him have been regarding personal matters. I recognize the characteristics of which others have spoken, but as I look back I can see no one who has ever touched my life with so much of warmth, and was a part of it like the love of my own mother, as McBurney.

"After I was called to Newburg, when I visited New York, I would stay here in this room. There was always a place for me. I have spent many nights here on this lounge, and shall never forget his conversations before retiring and again in the morning. The best opportunity to talk with him was when he was shaving. He would stand and listen with only an occasional 'well, well!' until he had heard the whole story out. I shall never forget the prayers we had together. I always felt stronger after hearing him pray.

"I also remember something of the struggle through which he passed when Mr. Morse was married. He seemed to feel as if he were left alone.

"In 1881, on the voyage to the London conference, I spent five as sick days as I ever experienced. McBurney helped me up on deck in the morning, and down again at night. He saw that I was placed where I could get fresh air, himself covering me from the cold. When the weather did not permit my being out, he secured for me a well-ventilated place; then he removed my shoes and chafed my feet with his hands.

"Our hobbies brought us together. He was keenly concerned about the foundation of the historical library,

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and had tried to do something of the kind himself. He was also deeply interested in my connection with the Springfield school.

"I remember he was always looking after young fellows. One time at Newburg he went out of his way to speak with kindly interest to one of the boys who was filling the lamps. He always insisted on the last ten minutes at secretaries' conferences being given to the younger men for questions. He seemed to have a special concern for the diffident ones. Years after our first meeting he told me that what impressed him most at that time was my great awkwardness, and how little I seemed to have the qualifications for the secretaryship."

George A. Warburton said:

"All I remember of the first occasion on which I saw McBurney was the cordiality of his greeting and how busy he was. I wondered how a man who was so busy could ever stop to speak to me.

"I have always been impressed with the deep seriousness of his religious life. In his thought about the Bible, and his love of hymns, he was like the type of Methodists that I knew many years ago. My mother was always fond of quoting Wesley's hymns, and I loved to hear him quote those hymns. That was one bond of union between us.

"I felt very, very warmly attached to him. It seemed to me that he was a man with whom one could differ without in any way losing his confidence or his affection. Indeed, I have sometimes thought that it was really a means of increasing it, provided the difference was honest on both sides."

H. O. Williams said:

"I first met McBurney in 1881. I was conducting a boys' meeting, and a man came into the room very quietly and sat down. I did not know until the meeting was over that it was McBurney. He at once impressed me with the great sympathy and love he showed for the boys. He got hold of the hands of those little fellows, and seemed interested in every one.

"In 1882 I stopped in New York as I was on the way

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to attend the secretaries' conference at New Haven. As I came into the association rooms, McBurney came out of the office. I was surprised that he remembered me. Locking his arm in mine, we walked across the floor. Looking at my feet, he said, 'Are those the best shoes you have? They will never do for you to wear to New Haven.' I told him they were. He said, 'Well, you had better go right out and buy another pair.' I explained to him that I had money enough only to pay my expenses to the conference, and had not counted on buying any shoes. 'Well,' he said, 'I will let you have the money.' But my pride would not allow me to do that. He saw that he had hurt my feelings, so he took me into his office and we had a long talk. He said that secretaries must be very careful about their personal appearance in dress, and talked to me very kindly.

"Another thing that struck me was the dispatch with which he could get rid of a man when he was busy. He could shake your hand and shake you out of the office at the same time.

"What impressed me more than anything else was the deep prayer life of the man. Again and again when I have been in his office, he talked of praying about the problems in our work. He said that we did not pray enough."

H. P. Andersen said:

"I do not recall one point during the three years when I was intimately associated with him where we disagreed. I suppose he was peculiarly tender to the young and inexperienced. He counseled most wisely and sympathetically, and was exceedingly helpful spiritually. It was customary for him to hold a conference of the secretaries of New York City from month to month in this room. As we gathered together around the table, he showed a wonderfully close insight into the mind of every man. He would draw us out and advise us in the frankest kind of way.

"He was very particular about the appearance of things. He would come down to the Institute, run his finger along a table or chair, and then show the dirt on his finger. He would not say a word.

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"The supreme moment in my acquaintance with him was at the time when, after three or four years of work, my health had broken down, and it became apparent that I must leave New York. It was supposed that a permanent lung trouble had developed. I came to this room to counsel with him, and I recall how the tears trickled down his face. He showed to me that day a heart of love that no one has shown me except my own mother. We had a long conference and then knelt down and prayed together.

"I remember in giving his advice about the best way in which to deal with men, he said, 'The first thing is to get under a man's vest.' This was always his method, to get at a man personally, and win his love and his sympathy. The power to do this was, I believe, his supreme quality."

John Glover said:

"I came to New York in 1883, and called at the Twenty-third Street building to learn of a suitable boarding-house. I had met McBurney once. Upon entering his private office, I found him so occupied in writing that, without looking up, he said in his blunt but kind way, 'Well, what can I do for you? Be quick, for I am very busy.' When I told him what I wanted, he threw down his pen, put his arm around me, and led me into an outer office where he introduced me to an assistant, from whom I secured the desired information. It was in such a kindly way that I did not feel that he wanted to get rid of me, and I went away feeling that I had one friend in New York.

"Afterwards when I became one of the secretaries of the international committee, I roomed in this building. He often called me up to sit with him while he was dressing. I could never understand why he showed a preference for me. I often went out walking in the park with him. I remember his sitting down beside a young man who was a perfect stranger, and his asking, 'Where do you live?' in such an unobtrusive manner that the fellow could not have done anything else but answer.

"One thing I remember very gratefully about McBurney was his courtesy to my sister when she was

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here in New York. He showed the quality of a true gentleman. She has referred to this frequently since, and it made an impression upon her such as it has upon some of our secretaries. Being a bachelor and not a ladies' man, it was the more noticeable.

"During his last illness, he sent for me frequently to come to the hospital. I was much impressed with his sweet endurance."

F. G. Banister said:

"I think that the last public meeting he addressed was the men's meeting at the Harlem branch, the third Sunday in December, 1898. Throughout the address he seemed to feel that his work was nearly done. I shall never forget how he stood before our men and told the story of the gospel. He plead with the men to give their hearts to Christ, and seemed to desire that every word should count. Three or four of our men that afternoon yielded their lives to Jesus Christ."

Henry M. Orne, who was the last speaker, was for nine years McBurney's close associate in the management of the New York association, and has been chosen as his successor. Mr. Orne graduated from college in 1878, and came to New York to enter into business. His employer, as a Christmas present, presented him with a ticket of membership in the Twenty-third Street association. He relates:

"One evening McBurney came up to me soon after I joined the association, put his arm on my shoulder in a friendly way, and said, gently, looking straight in my eyes, 'Do you love the Saviour, my boy?' From almost anybody else I would have resented the question, but from him, in the way he asked it, I did not. I realized then that he had formed a bond of sympathy between us, and that whenever he would ask anything of me, I would respond and love him.

"He had a knowledge of young men's hearts and a



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sympathy with them as had no other man I have ever met. As I recall my feeling toward McBurney at that time, I can easily understand how so many men say that he was a father to them. Not having any children of his own, he made all young men children to himself. He saw something to love in many young fellows with whom others would not feel drawn to shake hands, or even exchange greetings. It was this great volume of deep love in his heart poured out towards those he met which drew from them an allegiance to himself, and which reminds me of the effect of the realization of God's love to men when they discover and accept it. I became as loyal to him as a young man could be to anybody. As I look back, I can ascribe the beginning of my great interest in the association to the few words spoken to me by McBurney.

"In 1889 I was called by the finance committee to help McBurney in the finances of the association. When I came to talk the matter over with him, it was in this room. He sat at this table writing letters, as he often did at night, and he wrote all the time we were together. He told me what would be expected of me, and said that he had confidence in me, and knew that I had been loyal to him in the past. Then he said, 'Now, Henry, you will find I am a great bear. I will be very rough with you at times, and I want you to know that in advance.' I replied, 'I do not think you will be—you never have been yet.' 'I will be,' he said, as he raised his head, 'you will have to bear with me, my son.' So I came on April 15, 1889.

"His generosity with money was a marked characteristic. Once he came out of his office indignantly shaking his fist he was so moved, and said of a man who had just left, 'I could do nothing with him.' I asked, 'What were you trying to do with him?' He answered, 'I could not persuade him to take any money. He is in abject circumstances and needs it, but I could not prevail on him to take it.' It grieved him to the heart. He was like a father with a child too independent to accept his loving gifts.

"In the summer of 1889 this building caught fire and almost ruined his library. He felt so grieved you would

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have thought it was his house builded with his own hands."

Mr. Orne then told of a disagreement between himself and McBurney at a meeting of the directors concerning the repair work to be done on the room. This resulted in their relations becoming so strained that Mr. Orne thought best to hand in his resignation.

He said:

"I wrote a letter of resignation and started to the telephone to find out if the president of the association was at his office, intending to deliver the letter at once; but before I had signaled, McBurney followed me, put his arms around me, and with tears in his eyes he drew me on to my knees with him and began to pray.

"Now, what could you do with a man like that? Of course we were reconciled and understood each other better for the experience. We never had any real difficulty again. I was frank in telling him what I thought, and he was the same with me.

"He had a strong yearning for companionship, and seemed to enjoy talking about men he knew. All the time there was appreciation on my part of his superiority and his hold upon my affection which I was afraid to let him see. I felt that if he knew how much I loved him and would do for him, he would claim more and more; and it seems to me now I selfishly withheld the manifestation of love for him that I feel I should have given. He required much because he gave much."

McBurney died near the close of the nineteenth century, and at the end of the first half-century of the history of the Young Men's Christian Association. It is difficult at this early date fully to estimate his career, and chiefly because it is still impossible to measure the real significance of the association movement in modern life. But a few things stand out

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clearly already. He will certainly be looked upon as the pioneer in this cause, the apostle to the young men of his generation. As the association increases in power, his statesmanlike qualities and foresight will receive a larger and more appreciative recognition. By his friends he will be remembered as the loving, devoted servant of Jesus Christ, the faithful adviser, and the inspiring leader. In New York City he will be cherished as the one who developed one of its most important and beneficent institutions. He was the great general secretary. His impress upon the secretarial brotherhood can never be effaced. This influence will abide. In the future records he will stand beside Sir George Williams as one of the chief figures in the work which God has so signally owned, and of whose foundation and beginnings he was himself such an omnipresent part.

## APPENDIX

At a meeting of the board of directors of the Young Men's Christian Association of the city of New York, held at the general office, March 15, 1897, Mr. Morse and the recording secretary were requested to prepare a minute to be spread upon the records of the board in commemoration of the long and valued services rendered the association for thirty-five years by General Secretary Robert R. McBurney.

In commemoration of the fact that its general secretary, Mr. Robert R. McBurney reached his sixtieth birthday on the 31st of March, 1897, and the thirty-fifth year of his connection with the association as its chief employed officer, the board desires to place upon its minutes an expression of their profound appreciation of the remarkable and invaluable service which he has rendered to young men and the Young Men's Christian Association of this city, and to the entire brotherhood to which the association belongs.

As early as the year 1854, at seventeen years of age, he first entered the rooms of the association on the evening of his arrival in the city. Eight years afterward, in 1862, his connection with the association as its employed officer began.

He was elected director and recording (virtually general) secretary in 1862, and in 1866 (April 2), when the western branch rooms were opened, that work of extension began which has been steadily pressed forward for the past thirty years without serious drawback.

When he became its employed executive officer in 1862, the association had 150 members, was occupying three small rented rooms, and expending in its work annually \$1,700. Now, with 7,309 members, it carries on its work at fifteen points, owning nine buildings, valued at \$2,000,000, and expending annually in its diversified work \$175,000.

## *Appendix*

While Mr. McBurney has appreciated at its just value the machinery of the organization, its buildings and its equipment, he has always given the place of first importance to that part of the association work which consists in the hand-to-hand effort connected with personal intercourse, Bible study and teaching, and all those spiritual, quiet, Christian activities growing out of a living faith in Christ, and a supreme purpose to lead young men into His fellowship and service.

His personal influence exerted incessantly these many years upon the lives of young men, one by one, has endeared him to a great multitude, many of whom are now honored and useful in professional, business, and church life, and all of whom value him as a friend associated with what is best in their character.

Beyond the limits of New York City his influence has been felt throughout the association brotherhood in a very remarkable manner. His name is almost omnipresent, and represents one of the most important personal factors in creating or shaping the following features of the association movement:

1. The first distinctive association building, in 1869.
2. The first practical demonstration of the fourfold work—physical, social, intellectual, and spiritual.
3. The resolutions of the international convention, (1) creating state and provincial organizations, (2) adopting the evangelical test of membership, (3) locating the international committee in New York City, (4) appointing the November Day and Week of Prayer for young men.
4. He secured the money necessary to put Robert Weidensall in his field as senior secretary of the international committee.
5. He enlisted Richard C. Morse as first general secretary of the international committee.
6. He was first chairman of the international committee's subcommittee on its work in foreign lands.
7. He was the earliest and strongest leader; in fact, the "father" of the New York state organization.
8. He was the most influential member of the general secretaries' conference and association.
9. He was the counselor and helper of the founder

## *Appendix*

of the Secretarial Training School at Springfield, Massachusetts.

10. He has attended every meeting (save one) of the world's conferences of the association since the year 1872, and always as an invaluable leader in the American delegation and in the conference.

The board places upon its minutes this brief and imperfect minute of the extraordinary service rendered by its general secretary during his unexampled term of service with profound gratitude to God for his abundant blessing upon his servant during these many years, and with the earnest prayer that Mr. McBurney may receive increasing tokens of the Divine presence and favor in the good work to which he has consecrated his life.

(Signed)

BRADFORD K. WILEY,  
Recording Secretary.

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